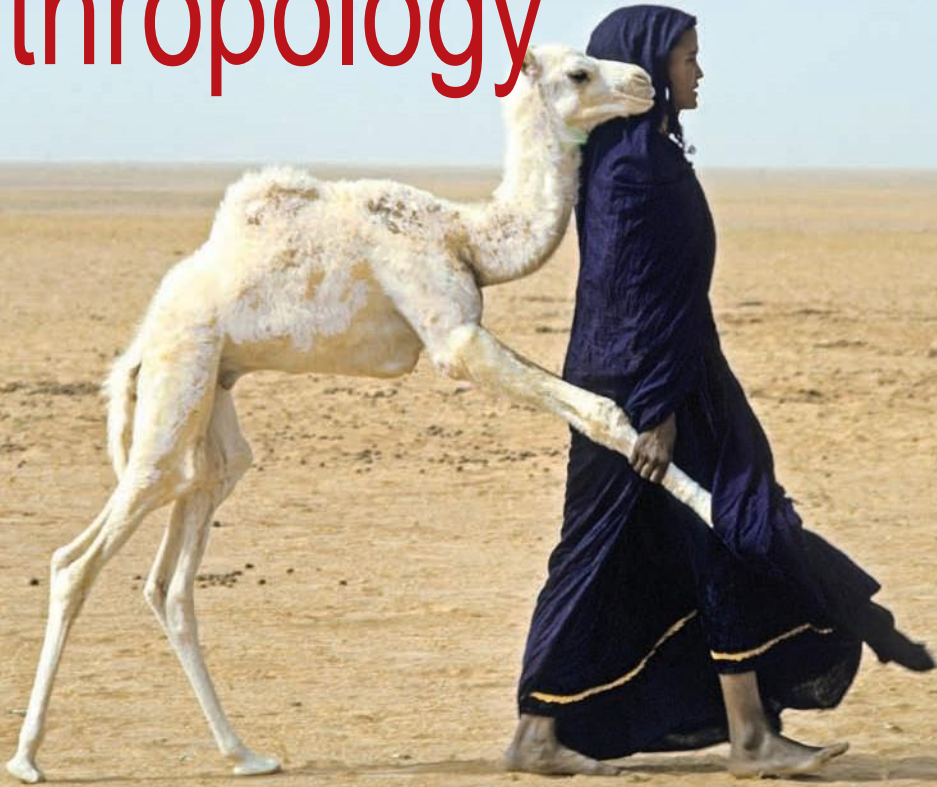# Why A Public Anthropology

Why A
Public
Anthropology

Rob Borofsky

Center for a Public Anthropology | Hawaii Pacific University

Center for a Public Anthropology
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"When you go to Haiti, when you go to Africa . . . they do not ask you how much do you feel for my people, how much have you studied . . . my people, they say have you brought anything?"

    With all this privilege, with this fantastic education we have gotten, what is the nature of our responsibility to the rest of the world?"

    What makes a great leader? "It is not just charisma; it is not just the people who can produce interesting banter.   Its people who will take responsibility for a situation and move it to a place where that is better than it was before. That is something for every single person to aspire to."

<div align="right">
Jim Yong Kim, Co-Founder of Partners in Health
and President of the World Bank
</div>

" This provocative study sets ambitious goals for what might be achieved by a public anthropology and offers ways to carry forward a project that could be far-reaching in its consequences."

" Rob Borofsky helps us see anthropologists, and by implication most social scientists, in a new light. Why do they publish so much but seldom agree? Does cultural anthropology make progress or does it merely rehash old questions? Borofsky addresses these issues candidly and offers ways to renew the social sciences and improve their efforts to address critical public problems."

" Rob Borofsky delivers a gem of a resource for anyone interested in anthropology, especially students of the field. Part polemic and part review of vexing problems in the discipline, Why a Public Anthropology? offers a critique (one to which other social sciences are also vulnerable): the discipline's history of producing new knowledge without building upon foundational theories; and its consequent reluctance to engage in activism on behalf of the communities and societies granting the privilege of studying them. Borofsky's final message is one of transformation: he calls on those both within the discipline and without to practice anthropology in service of the public—to not simply "do no harm," but to do good."

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PREFACE

Why a Public Anthropology? begins: "Cultural anthropology has the potential to change the world. It can bring institutional accountability, facilitating transparency in political and social matters. It encourages 'big picture' understandings that allow us to appreciate important problems in deeper and broader ways than we might otherwise."

READING THIS BOOK EFFECTIVELY

Deciding on a Reading Strategy. Selecting an effective reading strategy, I suggest to students in my classes, is the most critical decision students make in beginning a book. Different materials require different reading strategies. (One does not read a newspaper, for example, the same way one reads Shakespeare.) Students often discover an effective strategy depends not only on the book's subject matter but also on how students are examined on the material. That is to say, students learn that to read effectively in a course, they often need to understand what they are required to know - what they will be tested on. Reading for a multiple choice exam - where the focus is on details - involves a different reading strategy than reading for an essay or short answer exam - where the emphasis is on ideas.

Let me explain what I suggest to students at Hawaii Pacific University so they can empower themselves as active, thinking readers. The students and I call the method "constructing meaning."

Constructing Meaning. Students need to do more than passively read words on a page. They need to think about what they are reading and actively put together various pieces of information to construct the author's perspective. Boiled down to its basics, "constructing meaning" involves three steps.

(1) *Read carefully the first paragraph of each chapter or each paper:* The first paragraph usually gives students a sense of what the chapter or paper (in the Round Table) is about. It introduces the reader to the points the author wishes to make.

(2) *Use Headings as well as Highlighted and Italicized Material to Grasp a Chapter's (or Paper's) Main Points:* In reading a chapter, students should focus on (a) the chapter's title, (b) section headings within the chapter, and (c) the italicized material throughout the chapter.

(3) *Reading by Paragraphs:* Reading "by paragraphs" means focusing on the key sentence sentences in a paragraph and then proceeding on to the next paragraph to grasp that or

paragraph's key sentences. In the material that follows, the key sentence or sentences are usually the first sentence and/or first and second sentences in a paragraph.

Saying that students should read the first or first two sentences in a paragraph does not mean they should not later read every sentence in the paragraph. But moving to the details - that each participant in the Round Table uses to support his or her arguments - should wait until the reader is clear exactly what the author's arguments are. Focusing on details first, is a bit like putting the cart before the horse. It can work, but it is far more efficient to have the horse pull (rather than push) the cart. Reading by paragraphs, students discover, not only allows them to get through a chapter quickly. More importantly, it facilitates *separating out details from main themes*. It allows them to comprehend what the author's main points are.

Let me add two important notes. <u>(a)</u> Students in my classes are often surprised to discover that reading slowly does not necessarily improve comprehension in a book such as this. It may, in fact, decrease comprehension. The slower one reads, the more details one becomes mired in, the less likely one will comprehend the chapter as a whole. <u>(b)</u> Students come to realize they need not know the meaning of each and every word in a paragraph or recognize each and every citation referred to in order to grasp the idea of a section. Many terms or citations can be figured out in a general way from the context. Key terms that cannot, may be looked up in a dictionary later. Some terms or citations, because they relate to minor points, may also be set aside.

(4) <u>Reconstructing an Author's Argument</u>:   Having finished a chapter (or a paper in the Round Table), I suggest to students that it helps to review the chapter's (or paper's) main points. Students should be able to perceive the author's basic argument: (1) what the author's main points are as well as (2) how the author builds these points into a coherent argument.

(5) <u>Assessing the Author's Argument</u>:   With this information in hand, I encourage students to then *assess* the author's argument. Understanding what the author intends to say, they now can decide to what degree the argument makes sense, to what degree it is supported by data presented. Is the author's position convincingly argued? Does it leave

students think of counter-examples that raise questions about the author's points? Here is the time students can go back and read for details as they answer these questions. Having a broad overview, they can use the details within paragraphs as appropriate, where appropriate to answer such questions.

Instead of conceiving of reading as a passive process - taking in information presented to you - students in my classes, in other words, come over time to view reading as an active, thinking process. It is a little like being a detective. They perceive themselves as constructing and assessing an author's argument from clues present in a chapter.

A Note to Interested Teachers.   My experience at Hawaii Pacific University suggests students are often quite willing to utilize a "constructing meaning" reading strategy. What will make them more effective readers, they indicate to me, is *not* a lot of instruction in how to read effectively. They can learn this mostly on their own. What will make them more effective readers is *a sense of trust* that they can improve their chances of success in a course by using this strategy, that it will not work to their detriment (as it surely will if they are tested with a multiple-choice exam after using it).

Here the responsibility falls on me as their teacher. Students want to know beforehand how they will be tested. A class period - at the beginning of the semester - dedicated to discussing the types of questions students might be asked on exams and how best to prepare for them during reading assignments works wonders in my courses. Students then know exactly what to expect when they begin a book. Reading becomes less a matter of guessing what a teacher wants, less a matter of reaching beyond a student's personal background to pick up subtle clues (that may be missed because of cultural, class, and/or age differences with the teacher). It allows students to focus on the bigger questions that we, as teachers, want them to address.

CHAPTER 1

Cultural Anthropology's Challenge

Introduction: **Cultural anthropology has the potential to facilitate important social change. It can bring institutional accountability, facilitating transparency in political and social matters. It can encourage "big picture" understandings that allow us to appreciate important social concerns in deeper and broader ways than we might otherwise. It possesses tools that anyone, anthropologists and non-anthropologists alike, can use to bring social transformation.**

The problem is that cultural anthropology operates within certain contexts that limit this potential. As practiced today, the field's potential remains mostly unrealized.

The challenge facing cultural anthropology is whether it can rise above these contexts to realize its potential as a field. *Why a Public Anthropology?* deals with the tension between what is and could be within cultural anthropology. It conveys that the field's present dynamics work for some – anthropologists involved in the chase for academic status – but not for the larger society that makes anthropology possible. As you will see, cultural anthropology could potentially be of enormous benefit to the larger society. It could not only enrich our collective understandings of people around the globe but transform the quality of many people's lives.

The book asks: Is cultural anthropology up to this challenge? Can the field rise above its present limitations to serve the common good?

1.1– <u>Question</u>: You just noted that anthropology has disciplinary tools that anyone – anthropologist and non-anthropologist alike – can use to bring social transformation. What are they?

<u>Participant-Observation</u>: Bronislaw Malinowski, a prominent early twentieth century anthropologist, famously stated his goal in anthropology was "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize *his* vision of *his* world." To do this, he lived as a

participant-observer for roughly two years – between 1915 and 1918 – among the Trobriand Islanders of Papua New Guinea in the South Pacific. Quoting him:

There is all the difference between a sporadic plunging into the company of natives, and being really in contact with them. What does this latter mean? . . . It means that his life in the village, which at first is a strange, sometimes unpleasant, sometimes intensely interesting adventure soon adopts quite a natural course very much in harmony with his surroundings. Soon after I had established myself in [the village of] Omarakana (Trobriand Islands), I began to take part, in a way, in the village life, to look forward to the important or festive events, to take personal interest in the gossip and the developments of the small village occurrences; to wake up every morning to a day, presenting itself to me more or less as it does to the native. . . .

I ceased to be a disturbing element in the tribal life . . . altering it by my very approach, as always happens with a new-comer to every [such] . . . community. In fact, as they knew that I would thrust my nose into everything, even where a well-mannered native would not dream of intruding, they finished by regarding me as part and parcel of their life, a necessary evil or nuisance, mitigated by donations of tobacco. . . . Whatever happened was within easy reach, and there was no possibility of its escaping my notice.

. . . really important quarrels and rifts within the community, cases of illness, attempted cures and deaths, magical rites . . . all these I had not to pursue, fearful of missing them, but they took place under my very eyes, at my own doorstep, so to speak.

Understanding Cultural Context: In cultural anthropology, understanding is often achieved by placing various beliefs and behaviors within their cultural contexts. What may seem strange

and exotic to those unfamiliar with a group's practices often make sense when placed within indigenous contexts of meaning.

That is why anthropologists spend considerable space in their ethnographies discussing indigenous terms and conveying the subtleties and complexities of indigenous perceptions. It clarifies, to quote Clifford Geertz, a sense of "what goes on in such places . . . What manner of [people] are these?"

Let me offer two examples from my own fieldwork to illustrate contextual analyses. (They are drawn from my book *Making History*.) I spent forty-one months conducting research on a small Polynesian atoll in the northern Cook Islands called Pukapuka. To explain how Pukapukans acquire and validate knowledge of the past, I described what life was like on the atoll when I lived there.

(1) As Molingi was trying to make a particular [traditional] string figure (*waiwai*), Nimeti, her husband, jokingly criticized her efforts. When she failed to do it right the first time and had to try over again, he turned to me and stated she did not know how to make such things. Here was the proof; she could not do a string figure. Molingi appeared to ignore his comments. She seemed absorbed in trying to work out where she had gone wrong in making the figure. Again Nimeti criticized her efforts. Finally Molingi turned to him and stated that he was getting senile. (Both of them are in their seventies.) Didn't Nimeti recognize, she rhetorically asked, that she was an expert on traditional matters?

As a result of Molingi's comment, Nimeti picked up a string and started making a figure himself. Molingi scoffed at his efforts. My daughter, Amelia, came by and asked Nimeti what he was doing. He proudly showed her his figure. Molingi criticized Nimeti's

string figure as something any child could do. Finally Molingi finished her figure and showed it to me. She pointedly noted that Nimeti did not know how to make one like hers. Nimeti laughed at the implied challenge and began to work on a different string figure. Here was another one, he commented, that Molingi did not know.

(2) One day, after gathering some poles in Loto's public reserve to build the roof of my cook house, I stopped at a pule guardhouse to rest and talk with two of the guards. They were both women, one in her late thirties and the other in her late twenties. One thing led to another and we started discussing whether it was the legendary figure Waletiale or Malangaatiale who possessed an enlarged penis. Both of them asserted that it was Malangaatiale. They admitted uncertainty as to exactly who Waletiale was, but basically felt that he was another character entirely. I, on the other hand, asserted that Waletiale possessed the enlarged penis and that the legend of Malangaatiale concerned a man struck by lightning.

We discussed our differences of opinion for a while without coming to any agreement. Then the younger of the two women asked me how I knew my version of the two legends was correct. I replied that this was what several old people, especially Petelo and Molingi, had told me.

As I listened to them, they again discussed the whole issue between themselves. What I had said did not really seem right to them. But they admitted that they themselves were not that sure of either legend. Finally, they decided that I might indeed be right. Unlike them, I had discussed the issue with Petelo and Molingi, both recognized experts on Pukapukan legends.

Emphasizing contextual understanding, then involves taking numerous experiences such as these and drawing general principles from them. It allows readers to understand other people they are unfamiliar with through the contexts in which these people lead their lives.

Comparison: The third anthropological tool, comparison, compares behaviors and beliefs in one group of people with related data from another group (or groups). By bringing more than one case to bear on a problem, anthropologists perceive suggestive possibilities for explaining how cultural trait A influences B or how trait C causes D. In what are termed "controlled comparisons," anthropologists explore a select number of related contexts involving a limited number of differences and/or similarities to better understand key cultural dynamics across a number of groups. Here are two examples.

The first involves British anthropologist S. F. Nadel's study of four African societies relating to the dynamics of witchcraft. (Because of length considerations, I limit my summary here to the two West African societies he discusses.) The Nupe and Gwari, he notes, shared a number of cultural similarities regarding social, economic, and political organization. But they differed on one significant point. Among the Nupe only women were witches, among the Gwari both men and women were. Why the difference? Nadel points out that Nupe women were traders, and this trading often provided them with economic power and wealth. Moreover, it allowed Nupe women the freedom to become involved in a number of extramarital liaisons. Gwari women lacked this power and freedom. They were unable to challenge the cultural norm of male dominance existing in both cultures. Nadel suggests that the gap between the ideal power of men and the real power of women focused witchcraft accusations on female traders among

the Nupe. Social stresses among the Gwari were more diffuse and as a result so were the witchcraft accusations.

In the second example, Eric Wolf uses historical material to compare responses to colonization in Meso-America and Central Java. He suggests that a type of peasant village – called "closed corporate communities" – arose in both locales due to similar pressures during the colonial era. Closed corporate communities, as defined by Wolf, were communities with communal jurisdiction over land, restricted membership, redistributive mechanisms for surplus, and barriers against outside goods and ideas. Part of the reason they developed, he suggests, was because of administrative efforts to restrict the power of colonial settlers. "By granting relative autonomy to the native communities, the home government could at one and the same time ensure the maintenance of cultural barriers against colonist encroachment, while avoiding the huge cost of direct administration." Another formative factor concerned the enforced economic dualization of the colonial society, which involved a dominating entrepreneurial sector and a dominated peasant sector. Indigenous peasants were relegated "to the status of part-time laborers, providing for their own subsistence on scarce land, together with the imposition of charges levied and enforced by . . . local authorities." Using comparison, then, Wolf was able to perceive important dynamics shaping peasant communities during the colonial era in diverse parts of the world.

Summary: This section discusses cultural anthropology's three central methodological tools: participant-observation, contextual understanding, and comparison. Through participant- observation – in which anthropologists act both as participants in and observers of the people they are studying – they come to understand these people not as strangers but as colleagues.

Placing behaviors, that at first glance, may seem strange to us, within the contexts of the people who live them offers a tool for understanding what makes people and institutions operate the way they do. By comparing beliefs and behaviors among different groups, anthropologists can step back from a range of details and see a bigger picture that considers the underlying dynamics at work among various groups.

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1.2– Question: You suggested in the introduction that anthropologists can encourage positive solutions to important social problems. Can you provide some examples?

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Anthropology is a historically unique project. No intellectual effort in recorded history has involved as many scholars striving to understand people living in different locales on their own terms. One might cite a number of examples of anthropologists speaking out relating to important social concerns: Nancy Scheper-Hughes disclosing the international buying and selling of kidneys; Carolyn Nordstrom illuminating the illegal networks that perpetuate Third World armed conflicts; Alex Hinton's explaining the killing fields of Cambodia; or Harri Englund describing why many human right NGO's (non-governmental organizations) are ineffective in Third World settings. This section briefly highlights three of the most prominent scholar- activists in anthropology: Franz Boas, Margaret Mead, and Paul Farmer.

Boas opposed racist theories of development. As Nazism strengthened its hold on Germany, he appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine in May 1936. *Time* called Boas' *The Mind of Primitive Man* "the Magna Carta of self-respect" for non-Western peoples. Based on years of

study, Boas emphasized that "physiological, mental and social functions are highly variable,

being dependent upon external conditions so that an intimate relation between race and culture does not seem plausible." A well-known somatological study of European immigrants Boas conducted for the United States Immigration Commission (published in 1912) confirmed this point. He spoke out on this issue in letters and articles to the *New York Times*, the *Nation*, and *Dial*. He wrote an open letter to Germany's President Hindenburg denouncing Nazism. He was the catalyst behind a 1938 "Scientists' Manifesto" opposing any connection between race and intelligence that was signed by 1,284 scientists from 167 universities.

Margaret Mead was a cultural icon. In her time, she was the most widely known and respected anthropologist in the world. At her death in 1978, there were tributes not only from the president of the United States but the secretary-general of the United Nations. In 1979 she was posthumously awarded the United States' highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Quoting from a description of her by the American Museum of Natural History (where she worked from 1926 until her death), Mead "brought the serious work of anthropology into the public consciousness. . . . A deeply committed activist, Mead often testified on social issues before the United States Congress and other government agencies." She brought an understanding of culture – especially how it shaped human differences – to an international audience eager, in the aftermath of World War II, to address the ills of the world in less violent terms. Her intellectual output was staggering. She wrote 44 books and more than a thousand articles. She was a monthly columnist for the popular *Redbook* magazine from 1961 until 1978. She reputedly gave as many as 110 public lectures a year. She was a leader in the feminist movement. Her 1928 book, *Coming of Age in Samoa* may be the best-selling book of all time by an American anthropologist.

Paul Farmer is well known in Western medical and intellectual circles. Through his work as a medical doctor/anthropologist and Partners in Health (a nonprofit organization he helped found), Farmer has played a central role in improving the health care of millions. The *New York Times* reports, "If any one person can be given credit for transforming the medical establishment's thinking about health care for the destitute, it is Paul Farmer." Working through Partners in Health, he and others have been able to lower the price of drugs for the sick in Third World countries as well as change the World Health Organization's guidelines for treating the poor. The *New York Times* article continues, "Dr. Farmer and his Partners in Health have shown that a small group of committed individuals . . . can change the world." Quoting the Partners in Health website, "We build on the strengths and the communities by working within public health systems and serving where there are gaps . . . we invest directly in the communities we serve by training and employing a cadre of local community health workers to accompany our patients and their families through their care." This radically different – but very anthropological – perspective, has transformed health care in many Third World settings.

Summary: Beyond doubt, the three anthropologists discussed have made a difference in the lives of others. Boas used contextual understanding and comparison to emphasize to a wide public audience that behavior was more culturally, than racially, determined. Mead used these same tools, plus participant-observation, to describe how cultural dynamics often played a critical role in shaping behavior. Farmer starts with the fact that most diseases killing people in the Third World are treatable. He draws on participant-observation and contextual understanding to develop a health care system that emphasizes local participation as much as national and international resources in treating disease.

1.3 – <u>Questions</u>: Why aren't more anthropologists like Boas, Mead, and Farmer? Why has cultural anthropology not done more to address the world's problems?

Anthropologists such as Boas, Mead, and Farmer have always remained a minority within cultural anthropology. The problem is that the contexts within which anthropology generally operates today – universities – often undermine political engagement, often undermine addressing important social concerns in effective ways.

Establishing anthropology within universities shaped the discipline in very definite ways. Critically, for the themes of this book, it shaped why many anthropologists came to avoid political advocacy.

In the mid- to late-nineteenth century, as disciplines took shape, social scientists often lacked an aura of public credibility. They were deemed to be amateurs – unprofessional in orientation and training who might peddle this or that view but who lacked the proper expertise to draw others to take them seriously. Hence, many were open to raising their status (and salaries) by joining universities.

But becoming a credible professional in a university involved establishing a disinterested, "objective" attitude toward the subject studied. To see this, one can turn to Mary Furner's study of early social scientists, *Advocacy and Objectivity: A Crisis in the Professionalization of American Social Science, 1865-1905*, a book that won the Frederick Jackson Turner Award from the Organization of American Historians. Let me present four quotations from Furner's book so that she herself can explain what transpired.

(1) Establishing scientific authority [in the 1870s and 1880s] was . . . difficult for . . . [amateur social scientists] because many of them were publicly connected with controversial political positions. No matter how hard pre-academic social scientists tried to change their image . . . anyone who resented their findings . . . could easily cast doubt on their objectivity by hurling the reliable epithet, "reformer."

(2) By the end of the 1890s professional status and security competed with ideological . . . considerations as values [for social scientists] . . . . Direct appeal to the public . . . was retained as a theoretical right but . . . [social scientists at universities] were expected to channel most of their reform efforts through government agencies or private organizations where scholars could serve inconspicuously as technical experts, after the political decisions had been made, rather than as reformers with a new vision of society.

(3) Objectivity . . . [became] part of . . . [an] emerging professional identity, but . . . [university] leaders defined it in a special way. It restricted open public advocacy of the sort that allied . . . [social scientists] with reforms that threatened the status quo.

(4) The tension between advocacy and objectivity which characterized the professionalization process altered the mission of social science. Only rarely [as the twentieth century proceeded] did professional social scientists do what no one else was better qualified to do: bring expert skill and knowledge to bear on cosmic questions pertaining to the society as a whole. Instead, studies and findings tended to be internal, recommendations hedged with qualifiers, analyses couched in jargon that was

unintelligible to the average citizen. A fundamental conservatism developed in the academic social science professionals . . . The academic professionals, having retreated to the security of technical expertise, left to journalists and politicians the original mission – the comprehensive assessment of industrial society – that had fostered the professionalization of social sciences [in the first place].

In brief, to gain academic security and respectability, academics were drawn to behave in "professionally objective" ways. Academics were seduced away from social activism by the comforts and financial stability of university positions.

One can follow this process by examining the late-nineteenth-century case of Richard T. Ely, a prominent tenured economist at the University of Wisconsin. Ely, as Furner remarks, "was more active than anyone else [in economics] in taking his findings directly to the people and advocating specific reforms." When one of the University of Wisconsin's regents charged Ely with unprofessional behavior (including being an anarchist) in 1894, the university's Board of Regents held a trial to decide whether or not to dismiss him. Ely's most vigorous support came from nonacademic economists rather than academic economists who were afraid his case might undermine their status as reputable, objective scholars. Ely was cleared of the specific charges laid against him. But after the trial, he became more conservative in his views and turned toward writing scholarly publications rather than engaging in reformist activities.

Objectivity came to mean avoiding politically charged topics that might upset the "powers that be" in universities. But objectivity doesn't lie in avoiding certain topics, in appearing respectable.

The issue isn't whether one does (or doesn't) have a political agenda. To some degree, everyone has biases of one sort or another. Being a "disinterested" professional doesn't mean being uninterested in the world outside one's laboratory. It means putting the larger society's interests ahead of one's own interests or the interests of those one works for.

Objectivity derives from the open, public analysis of differing accounts, not from what we assert or suspect to be true. We know an account is more objective, more credible, more scientific, after other researchers – whatever their personal biases -- independently confirm the claims being made.

Take the controversy surrounding breast implants. Legal suits worth millions of dollars have been brought against breast implant manufacturers based on the claim that breast implants harm a woman's health. The former editor of the New England Journal of Medicine, Marcia Angell writes, "the idea that breast augmentation caused connective tissue disease has a superficial plausibility." But as Wikipedia observes: "Since the early 1990s, a number of independent systemic comprehensive reviews have examined studies concerning links between silicone gel breast implants and systemic diseases. The consensus of these reviews is that there is no evidence of a causal link between the implantation of silicone breast implants and systemic disease." Angell emphasizes the same point: "Several good epidemiological studies have failed to show an association between implants and a host of connective tissue diseases, symptoms, and abnormal test results." If one study contradicted another, we might search for an explanation in the biases of this or that researcher. But they do not. All the major research studies – whatever the political, personal, or financial interests of the researchers involved – came to the same basic conclusion. Despite the intellectual and legal plausibility for an association or what readers might wish to believe, in other words, there is

no objective support for an association between breast implants and connective tissue dissease.

In some complex cases, retesting claims may not be possible because certain data are difficult to replicate. In such cases, the key is conversations between those of divergent perspectives regarding what caused their results to diverge in unexpected ways. We see this in the Redfield-Lewis controversy. Two anthropologists, Robert Redfield and Oscar Lewis, both wrote ethnographies of a Mexican village called Tepoztlan, but their accounts differed in significant ways. Most anthropologists would agree that the process of sorting through their differences – by Redfield, Lewis, and their peers – led, to a more objective account of Tepoztlan's dynamics. It didn't matter that Lewis was of a more liberal persuasion than Redfield. What mattered was that various anthropologists, poring over the same material, found a way to make sense of the differences. Lewis, it turned out, focused more on actual behavior; Redfield, on ideal norms.

Objectivity, in brief, derives from the independent retesting of claims and the negotiated conversations arising out of this process. Advocacy has little, if anything, to do with objectivity. The opposition isn't between objectivity and advocacy. The opposition is between claiming objectivity and substantiating it. It is rubbish to assert that if one thinks objectively, that if one acts in a seemingly "disinterested" manner, if one avoids any hint of social advocacy, then one is objective.

We might note the example of Linus Pauling. Pauling was a prominent scientist who won a Nobel prize for his contributions to chemistry. But he was also a political activist and won the Nobel Peace prize for his opposition to above-ground nuclear testing. No one has challenged the value of Pauling's contributions to chemistry because he campaigned against the dangers of nuclear fallout.

Or take Noam Chomsky, one of the most prominent linguists of the 20th century. He is widely viewed as having revolutionized the study of language. He is also a political activist of considerable renown. He is a leading critic of American foreign policy as well as the American media, viewing the media as mostly a propaganda machine for supporting the power elite. Yet his political activism hasn't cast doubt on his intellectual work. In a 2005 poll by Prospect, a British publication, Chomsky was voted the leading public intellectual alive today. He has received honorary degrees from over 30 universities world-wide as well as a number of prestigious prizes and is a member of both the American Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Sciences.

Summary: Many anthropologists perceive that political advocacy conflicts with objectivity. In fact, the two are unrelated. Objectivity arises when people independently confirm a research project's results. It isn't particularly relevant that one of the confirming parties is a strong political advocate for a cause, only that the parties work independently of one another in confirming their results.

Why has objectivity often been equated with avoiding advocacy? If social scientists wanted to be perceived as "professional" academics and, more to the point, keep their university appointments, they needed to avoid challenging the "powers that be" within their universities

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1.4– <u>Question</u>: Can you describe other ways in which academic contexts shape the practice of cultural anthropology?

The university-based departmental structure shapes the discipline's definition, priorities, and self-image in definite ways. In the social sciences, topics of study frequently cut across various disciplines. You would be hard pressed to find a topic anthropologists study that some other discipline doesn't also study in some form. Power? Anthropologists study that; but so do political scientists. Economic exchanges? Both anthropologists and economists study them.

Clyde Kluckhohn, a noted post-World War II anthropologist, suggested that a degree in anthropology provided an intellectual poaching license to explore areas of interest in other disciplines. Clifford Geertz observed:

People who watch baboons copulate, people who rewrite myths in algebraic formulas, people who dig up Pleistocene skeletons, people who work out decimal point correlations between toilet-training practices and theories of disease, people who decode Maya hieroglyphics, and people who classify kinship systems into typologies in which our own comes out as "Eskimo," all call themselves anthropologists.

How does one decide who is an anthropologist? If an individual wants a position as an anthropologist – in a teaching or a non-academic context – that individual generally needs a graduate degree at the masters or doctoral level in anthropology. This means that, in most cases for most people, to practice anthropology one has to be credentialed by an

anthropology department. Once credentialized, the individual can legitimately study a wide range of subjects and still claim to be an anthropologist.

This or that individual might assert that she or he is an anthropologist. But to be seen by others and, critically, to obtain employment as an anthropologist, the key is having a graduate degree in the discipline at either the masters or doctoral level. It is like the old baseball saying that a pitch isn't a strike until the umpire calls it a strike. An individual isn't considered a professional anthropologist – no matter what she or he does – until some anthropology department grants that individual a graduate degree.

In this way, anthropology departments are central to anthropology's efforts to reproducing itself. Quoting the sociologist Andrew Abbott:

Non-disciplinary intellectuals have difficulty reproducing themselves because the American open market for public intellectuals is incapable of supporting more than a tiny handful of nonacademic writers and has no organized means of reproduction and exchange beyond some tenuous referral networks. Academia is, to all intents and purposes, the only practical recourse for American intellectuals. And being an academic means willy-nilly being a member of a discipline. There have indeed been great interdisciplinary geniuses, even within academia; Gregory Bateson is an obvious example. But they have no obvious mode of reproduction. They simply arise, revolutionize two or three disciplines, and leave magical memories behind.

Perceiving anthropology in this way helps make sense of applied anthropology's straddling of the academic/nonacademic divide. As the journal *Applied Anthropology* (later renamed *Human Organization*) indicated in its opening editorial, "*Applied Anthropology* is designed not only for scientists, but even more for those concerned with putting plans into

operations, administrators, psychiatrists, social workers, and all those who as part of their responsibility have to take action in problems of human relations."

Despite a determined effort to reach beyond the academy, a sizable number of applied anthropologists remain university based. Why? Because the field can only reproduce itself if a sizable number of applied anthropologists remain within the academy and train new generations of applied anthropologists.

Given anthropologists go off in all sorts of different intellectual directions, study all sorts of interesting topics, how should we define anthropology? Anthropology departments demarcate which topics are and are not perceived as proper anthropology. Let me explain.

If you look at the course offerings of different anthropology departments in different universities, you will notice that many courses have similar titles. Most departments, for example, teach introductory anthropology as well as courses in economic anthropology, religion, and anthropological theory. But if you examine the reading lists and the topics covered by courses with the same name, you will see tremendous diversity in respect to the books assigned, locales studied, and issues addressed. As long as teachers stay within certain departmentally defined parameters – have a recognized title for the course or make passing reference to material that might be perceived as anthropological – they are pretty much free to frame their courses as they wish and still call them anthropology.

This brings me to a definition of anthropology. If a particular topic is taught as part of an anthropology course by an anthropologist within an anthropology department then it is generally perceived as anthropological. Phrasing this another way, if some anthropologist in

some anthropology department somewhere teaches a particular subject, who is to say that what the teacher is teaching, or what the students are learning, isn't anthropology? Most people – inside and outside anthropology, inside and outside the university – would concur. Such a definition doesn't have the liberating sense of saying anthropologists do almost anything. But it cuts through the complications of deciding which topics "belong" to what discipline.

Let me offer two personal examples. I once taught an anthropology course at Hawaii Pacific University called "Is Global Citizenship Possible?" with the dean of the College of Natural Sciences. It covered a wide range of topics and involved readings from diverse disciplines. But no one ever questioned whether the course was "really" anthropology, at least to my face. I also taught a course called "Managing Our Mortality" with a registered nurse. It was a cross- listed course in both nursing and anthropology. Most nurses I talked to wanted to make sure there was a nursing component to the course. But the nurses never questioned whether the course was anthropological. They assume that if it was labeled as an anthropology course and was being taught by a professional anthropologist, it must be anthropology.

Various anthropologists define themselves and their discipline in broad, encompassing ways that enhance their intellectual freedom. But that doesn't mean that others – especially outside the discipline – accept their definitions. The assertions of this or that individual aren't what makes others accept particular definitions. What brings public consensus is when the definitions are embedded in publicly accepted social structures. The departmental structure has the authority, to define who is (and is not) an anthropologist as well as what is (and is not) anthropology. Basically, anthropology is what anthropology departments say it is.

Much money and energy has been put into developing university-based interdisciplinary studies. Today, centers – such as Centers of Latin American Studies – draw various disciplines together to address common problems. Some suggest this interdisciplinary movement will eventually dominate university life. Disciplinary-based departments, such as anthropology, will die out. They should not count on it. The interdisciplinary movement has been part of academic life for decades. But, even at its high point, in the years following World War II, it never came to dominate academic life. Interdisciplinary centers may co-exist with departments but, because of their limited control over tenure and promotion, they are not able to challenge the dominance of disciplinary-based departments within the university.

Readers may not be aware that some of the major specializations within cultural anthropology – medical anthropology, political anthropology, and economic anthropology, for example – are relatively recent. The expansion of specializations within cultural anthropology occurred during the 1960s. As university enrollments increased, anthropology departments expanded, and they hired more faculty. Faculty members in the same department often sought to carve out distinct areas of expertise. To advance their careers, new faculty needed publications that covered new topics that differentiated them from colleagues. Whatever intellectual justifications one might offer for the division of cultural anthropology into specializations and sub-specializations, departmental demographic pressures – an increase in the number of faculty within departments – helped drive the process forward.

Summary: The academic departmental structure plays a key role in determining who is and isn't perceived as an anthropologist as well as what is and isn't perceived as anthropology. If an individual wants a job as an anthropologist – either inside or outside the university – then that

person usually needs an advanced degree in anthropology provided by an anthropology department. One may argue in the abstract about whether a particular topic is anthropological. But it is generally assumed both within and outside universities that if a topic is taught by an anthropologist in an anthropology course offered in an anthropology department, then it is anthropology.

Despite efforts, since the 1920s – by the federal government, foundations, and universities – to encourage interdisciplinary studies, they have not replaced discipline-based departments because discipline-based departments control both tenure and promotion. The specializations and sub-specializations now common in cultural anthropology likely, at least in part, grew out of the need for anthropologists to differentiate themselves, one from another, within a department. As departments grew in size so did the specializations.

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1.5– <u>Question</u>: Can you explain how the departmental structure shapes the discipline's image of itself?

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While many anthropologists might disagree – because it goes against the scholarly traditions they grew up with as graduate students – an outsider might suggest certain "mythic" elements appear in the discipline's depiction of its past. Many affirm the two "myths" discussed here to be true despite clear evidence to the contrary. (That is why myth is initially placed in quotes.)

Starting with the first myth, many anthropologists affirm that Franz Boas is the father of American anthropology. One sees reference to Boas as the "father of American anthropology" in textbooks, in various disciplinary journals, book advertisements, even in

Wikipedia. However, it is not true.

Housing anthropology in university departments is today portrayed as an important step forward in the discipline's progress as a profession. The image frequently conveyed is that, prior to the establishment of university anthropology departments, anthropology was full of unprofessional amateurs.

For anthropology departments to retain control over the training (and reproducing) of anthropologists, they need to create barriers against amateurs training themselves. After all, if anyone can become an anthropologist by reading books and doing fieldwork on their own, what would be the value of an expensive departmental degree? Anthropology departments emphasize that they provide the training that turns amateurs into professionals. An obituary for Franz Boas makes this point: Boas "found anthropology a collection of wild guesses and a happy hunting ground for the romantic lover of primitive things; he left it a discipline in which theories could be tested and in which he had delimited possibilities from impossibilities."

In actual fact, there were a number of prominent anthropologists before Boas who exerted important influences on the discipline's development. Boas deserves to be recognized for establishing the first anthropology department (at Columbia University in New York City). But that doesn't mean he deserves to be called "the father of American anthropology."

The nineteenth century had a number of prominent anthropologists that were not trained in university settings; they were mostly self-taught. These included important theorists such as Lewis Henry Morgan and significant ethnographers such as James Mooney, Frank Hamilton Cushing, and Henry Rowe Schoolcraft. Lewis Henry Morgan, a lawyer turned anthropologist, has been described as one of "the most important social scientists in nineteenth-century America." Lewis Henry Morgan's *League of the Iroquois* was a precedent–setting

ethnography, as was James Mooney's *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*. John Wesley Powell helped establish the premier anthropological research unit of the nineteenth century in the United States, the Bureau of American Ethnology (housed in the Smithsonian Institution). While neither Morgan nor Powell worked in academic settings and they embraced a form of evolution that was anathema to Boas, they certainly were not unprofessional "amateurs." In many ways, they were the true founding fathers of the discipline.

The positioning of Boas as the "father of anthropology" was facilitated, in part, by his ability to produce the first generation of academically based anthropologists. His students came to control the American Anthropological Association as well as many of the academic departments in the country. They rewrote the discipline's history in their image. We can see the Boasian academic branding of the field through a small, rarely noticed detail. Once the Boasians gained control of the American Anthropological Association, its officers were no longer identified in the association's publications by their hometowns but rather by their institutional affiliations.

As a way of introducing the second myth, let me note that various textbooks conceive of the discipline's subfields in different ways. Alfred Kroeber, the foremost anthropologist of the post- World War II period, divided anthropology into race, language, culture, psychology, and prehistory. Ralph Linton, another prominent anthropologist during this period, wrote, "the two great divisions of anthropology . . . are known as physical anthropology and cultural anthropology." Cultural anthropology he divided into archeology, ethnology, and linguistics. (After noting that linguistics was "the most isolated and self-contained" of anthropology's

"subsciences" he dropped further discussion of it.) Today Carol and Melvin Ember and Peter Peregrine today divide anthropology into biological anthropology and cultural anthropology. Cultural anthropology they divide into archaeology, linguistics, and ethnology. Cutting across these four fields, they add a fifth one, applied anthropology.

These different ways for organizing the subfields point to a contradiction within the discipline. Anthropology is committed to intellectual progress and change. Yet it is centered in a bureaucratic structure – academic departments – that doesn't readily facilitate change.

When anthropology departments were created, they drew together scholars from an array of backgrounds to facilitate the examination of a set of intellectual concerns centered on the "cultural roots" of non-Western groups without recorded history. That is the reason researchers from cultural anthropology, archaeology, physical anthropology, and linguistics were included in anthropology departments.

The difficulty anthropology faces today – especially in cultural anthropology, which constitutes two-thirds of the discipline – is that many anthropologists have gone on to other questions, other concerns. As a result, they may find few common interests with departmental colleagues in other subfields.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Europe went through a major transformation. Unified nation-states were created out of fragmented, localized communities. "The inhabitants of Wales, of Scotland and of England," writes the historian, Linda Colley, "were separated from each other . . . [by] different folklores, different sports, different costumes, different building styles, different agricultural practices, different weights and measures, and

different cuisines." To smooth the transition to unified nation-states – to make a cohesive

emotional, cultural, and intellectual union out of such differences – scholars searched for cultural "roots" that validated the new nation-states.

When anthropologists studied non-Western groups during this period, they tended to carry the European search for cultural traditions over to the people they studied. You needed biological, linguistic, archaeological, and cultural clues to infer a group's origins and migrations. As one anthropologist phrased it, a primary task of American Anthropology was to determine questions of origins. How did they do this? "By the study of the physical types of the people, their archaeological remains, their languages, and their customs – the four fields of anthropology."

What does an anthropology department do when a large percentage of its members move off in new intellectual directions that separate them for others in the department? Do anthropologists reorganize themselves into separate, smaller, departments? As George Stocking observed: "Any movement in ethnology [or sociocultural anthropology] away from historical reconstruction could not help but have implications for the unity of anthropology."

Bureaucratically, anthropology departments are set up to defend anthropology – its funding, its faculty positions, its status in wider settings – against competitors. They aren't set up to continually change with changing trends, especially when one subfield moves off in a different intellectual direction.

How do anthropologists deal with this bureaucratic problem? Some ignore it, but many embrace a myth of disciplinary integration in times past. The anthropologist Eric Wolf expresses this myth in an often cited introduction to the field: "In contrast to the anthropological traditions of other countries, anthropology in the United States always prided itself upon its role as the unified and unifying study of several subdisciplines. In combining the pursuits of human biology, linguistics, prehistory, and ethnology, American

anthropology put a premium on intellectual synthesis, upon the tracing out of connections where others saw only divergence."

However, if we examine the 3,252 articles published in the *American Anthropologist*, the discipline's flagship journal, from 1899 to 1998, perhaps only 308 substantially draw on more than one anthropological subfield in the analysis of their data. That is to say, over a hundred- year period, possibly only 9.5 percent of the articles published in the *American Anthropologist* bring the discipline's subfields together in any significant way. Most of the articles focus on narrow subjects and use the perspectives and tools of only one subfield. The 3,252 articles are narrowly framed and narrowly presented, with relatively little synthesis across subfields – just like today.

Up until the 1970s, the total number of collaborative subfield articles decade by decade in the *American Anthropologist* was lower than 9.5 percent. Only eight times in the last hundred years has the number of collaborative articles – across subfields – reached at least 20 percent of the total articles published in the journal – in 1974, 1975, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1984, 1986, and 1989. True, early anthropologists often published articles in more than one subfield. But the critical point is that they rarely brought the subfields together in the same article, using different subfield perspectives to incorporate a broader synthesis in their analysis. In terms of the *American Anthropologist* from 1899 to 1998, collaboration across the subfields was a distinctly minority affair.

The lack of subfield integration in times past is readily apparent when you read through old issues of the *American Anthropologist*. So why would anthropologists affirm something about the past – that the subfields previously collaborated in significant ways – that is clearly at variance with established fact?

The myth of a "golden age" of disciplinary integration constitutes a "social charter" for today's departmental structure: It holds up an ideal. Disciplinary integration is imposed on the past – an "invention of tradition," to quote the famous British historian Eric Hobsbawm. But it also does more. It implicitly represents a call for disciplinary integration to resolve the current problem of departmental fragmentation.

The myth allows anthropologists to address a problem of social structure – intellectual fragmentation within a department – without the pain of anyone actually having to change. It allows them to pretend that they all once worked together as a team. It's very anthropological.

Summary: This section discusses two "myths" anthropologists affirm about their past to reinforce the scholarly solidarity of their departments. One "myth" airbrushes out the discipline's early amateurs and enshrines Franz Boas, the chair of the first anthropology department in the United States, as the father of American anthropology. Highlighting the role earlier amateurs played in the development of the discipline undermines departmental claims to professional authority – that departments, and only departments, have the authority to credentialize aspiring anthropologists.

The second myth suggests that once anthropologists held a unified disciplinary perspective. While anthropologists had different specializations, they all worked as a team to address a set of central concerns.

An examination of articles in the discipline's leading journal over a hundred-year period indicates this did not really occur. The myth functions as a charter for the department's present organization – allowing anthropologists to pursue their divergent interests without breaking up their discipline-based departments. These "myths" also highlight another point.

Rather than addressing disciplinary problems directly, some anthropologists lean toward myth- making to address it.

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1.6– _Question_: *How does the tension between cultural anthropology's potential for helping others and its academic–based practices play out in terms of the discipline's ethical code?*

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Cultural anthropologists tend to be caring, ethical people, who are concerned about the people they study. As already noted, no other intellectual effort in recorded history has involved as many scholars striving to understand people living in different locales on their own terms. However, as the discipline's ethical code demonstrates, cultural anthropologists also tend to be embedded in social structures that do not necessarily emphasize helping those who help them in their research.

Since its disciplinary beginnings, cultural anthropology has tended to be the study of less powerful groups by scholars from more powerful groups. Whether you phrase it as the First World studying the Third, "us" studying "them," or the richer studying the poorer, there is usually a power differential involved. Those with more power tend to be studying those with less.

Anthropologists do not return empty-handed from their research. They return with knowledge that they then systematically circulate to others in the form of publications and lectures. In most cases, this knowledge production enhances their careers. Few anthropologists make thousands of dollars from their publications and lectures. But most anthropologists make hundreds of thousands of dollars over their careers from salary increases and these increases are often dependent on publications. Publications constitute

critical stepping-stones for professional advancement.

The less powerful give something of value to the more powerful who are studying them. Anthropologists – out of respect, kindness, guilt, or a combination of these – often provide a host of compensating gifts. But rarely do these gifts approach the monetary value anthropologists earn as they advance through their academic careers based on studying and writing about the less powerful.

Some anthropologists acknowledge the problem in their writings. The famous French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss observes, "It is an historical fact that anthropology was born and developed in the shadow of colonialism." Talal Asad states, "It is not a matter of dispute that social anthropology emerged as a distinctive discipline at the beginning of the colonial era, that it became a flourishing academic profession towards its close, or that throughout this period its efforts were devoted to a description and analysis – carried out by Europeans, for a European audience – of non-European societies dominated by European power." Anthropology is, he continues "rooted in an unequal power encounter . . . that gives the West access to cultural and historical information about the societies it has progressively dominated."

We should be cautious here. The broad outline is clear, but there are shades of gray that also need to be noted. The anthropologist James Clifford observes that while colonial domination framed most anthropological accounts of times past, anthropologists "adopted a range of liberal positions within it. Seldom 'colonists' in any direct instrumental sense, ethnographers accepted certain constraints while, in varying degrees, questioning them."

What concerns me here is how anthropologists respond to this power differential. Many offer various forms of appreciation to informants: gifts, money, and/or help. A decent

percentage of anthropologists maintain contact with informants long after they have left the field. Interestingly, pre-World War II *American Anthropologist*s published obituaries of key informants. This suggests that many informants held honorable, publicly acknowledged places within the discipline during this period.

But at a broader level, the abstract formulations anthropologists offer for addressing this power differential today, while frequently sounding nice, often reinforce it. The 2009 Anthropological Association statement on ethics asserts that "anthropological researchers must ensure that they do not harm the safety, dignity, or privacy of the people with whom they work, conduct research, or perform other professional activities, or who might reasonably be thought to be affected by their research." (The 1998 version indicated they "must do everything in their power to ensure" rather than simply ensure.) It sounds good. But it involves a problematic formulation. Is it enough for anthropologists to leave their informants with a range of problems, confident that because they did not cause them, they need not help in easing them?

When things are falling apart politically and economically in a society, is doing no harm a reasonable standard to follow? There is self-absorption in the "do no harm" framing: the injunction implies that we – the outsiders, the Westerners, the powerful – are the major source of other people's troubles. If we leave others alone, everything will be fine. In the case discussed below, the troubles of the Ik people in Uganda did not stem from actions by Western institutions but from the actions of the Ugandan government. Doing no harm seems a rather harsh standard to follow, given that informants are not holding anthropologists to the same standard in interacting with them. Key informants could ignore an anthropologist studying them confident in the belief they are not doing the anthropologist harm. Instead the informants generally help the anthropologist in gaining information the anthropologist needs

to build a professional career.

What does "do no harm" mean when informants have been suffering for years before you arrive? Do you try to help alleviate their pain, their problems? Or do you simply sidestep them, believing that since you did not cause them, they are not your responsibility?

The Ik offer an instructive case study. Bordering on starvation, the Ik were falling apart as a society when the anthropologist Colin Turnbull studied them. The back cover of the 1987 paperback edition of Turnbull's book explains: "In *The Mountain People*, Colin M. Turnbull . . . describes the dehumanization of the Ik, African tribesmen who in less than three generations have deteriorated from being once-prosperous hunters to scattered bands of hostile, starving people whose only goal is individual survival. . . . Drought and starvation have made them a strange, heartless people, . . . their days occupied with constant competition and the search for food."

How does one respond to a situation such as this? The philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah ponders the question why "the former general secretary of Racial Unity [i.e., Colin Turnbull] had done so little to intervene? Why had he not handed over more of his own rations? Taken more children to the clinic in his Land Rover? Gone to the government authorities and told them that they needed to allow the Ik back into their hunting grounds or give them more food?"

As Turnbull himself explains, he took a group-dictated letter to government authorities at Moroto regarding the Ik's plight. "I delivered the letter and a report of my own, without much conviction that either would carry any weight." And when they apparently did not, he went off to the capital, Kampala, to stock up with fresh supplies for himself. That was it: no insistence, no pleading, no seeking to bring pressure on local authorities with letters to those higher up in the government, no public exposé with the hope of helping the Ik. What

Turnbull did in his book, instead, is offer a general reflection on the state of humanity: "Most of us are unlikely to admit readily that we can sink as low as the Ik, but many of us do, and with far less cause. . . . Although the experience was far from pleasant, and involved both physical and mental suffering, I am grateful for it. In spite of it all . . . the Ik teach us that our much vaunted human values are not inherent in humanity at all, but are associated only with a particular form of survival called society, and that all, even society itself, are luxuries that can be dispensed with."

Keeping the issue at an abstract level – doing no harm, reflecting on what the Ik teach us about ourselves – means the power differential is never addressed. The anthropologist remains an observer of other people's suffering and, in Turnbull's case, deaths. This standard allows anthropologists to claim the high road of morality – they have not caused ill by their presence – while letting the sufferings of the status quo prevail. It allows them to continue studying and publishing on the people – thereby advancing their careers – without creating political trouble for themselves by exposing in publications the underlying politics causing the suffering.

We could argue over what type of help anthropologists might reasonably offer to those they study. But rarely is the issue of fair recompense highlighted in the literature. Emphasizing "doing no harm" nicely sidesteps even having to discuss it.

In making this point, I would emphasize that there is no simple solution to resolving the power differentials embedded in the ethnographic endeavor. It is not from want of caring that the problem remains the uninvited guest in many anthropological publications and many anthropological meetings. Most anthropologists care about helping those who so caringly helped them. The question is how they might more effectively manifest this caring.

Summary: In decades' past, cultural anthropology frequently operated within colonial

contexts. Today elements of these contexts can be perceived in the power differentials between cultural anthropologists (normally from the First World) and the groups they study (usually living within the Third World). Anthropologists frequently acknowledge such power differentials, but they tend not to address an important problem implicit in them. The standard ethical injunction within anthropology is to "do no harm." But focusing on "do no harm," without seeking to do significant good, allows cultural anthropologists to advance their careers through studying and publishing on the group they study. It obscures the moral dilemma of one group – those being studied – helping another –anthropologists – and anthropologists while being kind-hearted offering substantially less help in return.

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*1.7 - <u>**Question**</u>: Can you describe a specific case of what you are suggesting in respect to doing no harm versus doing good?*

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The Yanomami offer an interesting study of the complexities surrounding do no harm. They are a well-known group of Amerindians living along the Brazilian-Venezuelan border. Through the work of various anthropologists, especially that of Napoleon Chagnon, they have become one of the best-known, if not the best-known, Amazonian Indian group in the world. People in diverse locales on diverse continents know of them. They have become a symbol in the West of what life is like beyond the pale of "civilization." They are portrayed in books and films, not correctly in my view, as one of the world's last remaining prototypically primitive groups. I presume, though I have no way of knowing for certain, that most anthropologists today are familiar with Chagnon's work. At least one, and perhaps several, generations of

American anthropologists have heard about the Yanomami and the controversies surrounding them.

The Yanomami are a tribe of roughly 20,000 Amazonian Indians living in 200 to 250 villages along the border between Venezuela and Brazil. "The fact that the Yanomamö live in a state of chronic warfare," Napoleon Chagnon writes, "is reflected in their mythology, values, settlement pattern, political behavior and marriage practices." He continues: "Although their technology is primitive, it permits them to exploit their jungle habitat sufficiently well to provide them with the wherewithal of physical comfort. The nature of their economy – agriculture – with the fact that they have chronic warfare, results in a distinctive settlement pattern and system of alliances that permits groups of people to exploit a given area over a relatively long period of time. . . . The Yanomamö explain the nature of man's ferocity . . . in myth and legend."

It is Chagnon's description of the Yanomami as "in a state of chronic warfare" that is most in dispute. The French anthropologist Jacques Lizot, in *Tales of the Yanomami*, writes: "I would like my book to help revise the exaggerated representation that has been given of Yanomami violence. The Yanomami are warriors; they can be brutal and cruel, but they can also be delicate, sensitive, and loving. Violence is only sporadic; it never dominates social life for any length of time, and long peaceful moments can separate two explosions. When one is acquainted with the societies of the North American plains or the societies of the Chaco in South America, one cannot say that Yanomami culture is organized around warfare as Chagnon does."

Napoleon Chagnon's writings, particularly his introductory ethnography *Yanomamö: The Fierce People* and the films associated with it, have made the Yanomami familiar to millions of college students since the 1960s. They have been used in introductory anthropology

classes for over three decades. It is not too far-fetched to suggest that Chagnon helped make the Yanomami famous as a tribe around the world and the Yanomami, in turn, have been the basis for Chagnon's own fame. His ethnography of the Yanomami has sold perhaps three million copies – more than any other ethnography in modern times. While Chagnon provided the Yanomami with a range of gifts during his fieldwork -- pots, machetes, and even rifles that were highly valued by the Yanomami -- they have not, to date, shared in the millions of dollars Chagnon has accrued in royalties. In respect to American anthropologists more generally, few have provided significant assistance in compensation for how their work with the Yanomami enhance their professional careers.

For some time now, the Yanomami have been physically and cultural decimated by disease and the intrusions of gold miners into their territory. No one has suggested that anthropologists caused these problems. They were clearly created by others. But is doing no harm sufficient in studying the Yanomami today?

During the debates over whether or not to set aside a large reserve in Brazil for the Yanomami in the 1980s and early 1990s – one was finally established in 1992 – various Brazilian politicians used the depiction of the Yanomami as violent to suggest that they needed to be split up into several small reserves to reduce conflict among them. Not coincidentally, the plan would have facilitated the expansion of gold mining in the area.

What upset many Yanomami specialists was that Chagnon spoke out against the misuse of his work by Brazilian politicians – as viewing the Yanomami as undeserving of a large reserve – only in the English-speaking press, never in the Portuguese-speaking press of Brazil where it would have done the most good. How far must anthropologists go to respond to the misuse of their work? Must they speak out in different languages if their published work is having a negative impact?

We might ask: Do Yanomami have the right to define who they are for their own political ends? The Yanomami define themselves as less violent than Chagnon portrays them, and most anthropologists agree. But what would happen if more anthropologists sided with Chagnon? Would this more negative view of the Yanomami be important to highlight as well, even though Yanomami would prefer not to have books that speak badly of them? Do you have to present a politically correct view – highlighting the positive and ignoring the negative – to not harm the informants who have helped you? What happens to ethnographic accuracy under the political circumstances encountered in Brazil? What does "do no harm" mean in this context?

On one side of these issues is Bruce Albert, an anthropologist who has spent decades working with the Yanomami:

Nobody maintains that the Yanomami do not practice warfare or that Yanomami individuals are not occasionally violent (true for most societies, including the United States). . . . But many people do maintain that it is unethical and politically damaging to reduce the richness of Yanomami society and culture to the stereotypical image of "the barbaric violence [that] Chagnon documented" [in the words of a 1995 Time magazine article]. . . . It requires only a minimal ethical sensibility and political awareness to understand that such long-term pejorative labeling and its apparent scientific authority can be (and have been) used by anti-Indian agitators to rationalize and encourage violations of Yanomami rights – nobody ever said such labeling caused them. . . . We need to ask why Napoleon Chagnon never publicly came out [in Brazil] to condemn the use of his work by sensationalist journalists and unscrupulous politicians, or to support the international movement in defense of Yanomami survival.

On the other side is Ray Hames, a student of Napoleon Chagnon who has also worked with the Yanomami:

No matter what precautions ethnographers take to qualify or even sanitize their ethnographic accounts of indigenous populations, ethnographic accounts can always be used against them. At the same time, I would emphasize that such accounts are insignificant explanations of why governments and other powerful interests seek to destroy indigenous peoples. . . . [The] belief that government officials are swayed by ethnographic reports rests on a number of assumptions that I believe are faulty. It . . . assumes that generals and others not only read scientific reports on indigenous peoples but such that such reports affect their decision-making processes. By implication it means that if the Yanomamö were described as peaceful, then military and economic interests would be inhibited from taking indigenous land because they could not rationalize control, partitioning, or seizure of Yanomamö land. . . . What is completely ignored by those who criticize Chagnon's alleged lack of interest in what the press has to say about the Yanomamö is the way in which he has utilized the press to portray the plight of the Yanomamö. . . . Given the enormous readership of his ethnography, my best guess is that his writings have done more to reach the educated public about the serious problems faced by the Yanomamö than those by any other individual or organization.

Doing no harm may sound good. But as we see in the Yanomami case, it can get rather complicated. It glides over the power differentials in which the people an anthropologist studies gain relatively little from their interaction while the anthropologist gains much. It is also difficult to assess. What constitutes doing no harm? Despite the heated debates on the subject, it seems far from clear in the Yanomami case. Does one avoid certain topics, for

example? Does one emphasize only the positive? Does the anthropologist depict a group as the group itself wants to be depicted?

Personally, I do not believe Chagnon intentionally meant to harm the Yanomami in depicting them as violent. He was making a broader, comparative point about human levels of violence. The problem is – despite trying to "do no harm" – there were unintended consequences to his actions. That is what makes the "do no harm" standard so tricky. It is not simply a matter of "good intentions" but of "good results." What is clear is that the Yanomami continued to suffer and anthropologists continued to write about them. The "do no harm" ethic may help anthropologists but it scarcely helps the Yanomami.

Summary: Napoleon Chagnon, who has extensively written on the Yanomami, has referred to the Yanomami as fierce and in a state of chronic warfare. This depiction as violent was used by certain Brazilian politicians in attempting to narrow the boundaries of a legally defined Yanomami reserve – thereby allowing more gold miners access to the region. (The goldminers presence would have significantly disrupted Yanomami of life.) Chagnon's description raises a question: Should anthropologists be sensitive to how their depictions of those they study get manipulated by other people – even if the depictions are perceived to be accurate? Does "doing no harm" mean not giving harmful people an opportunity to do harm? Or does it mean speaking in honest ways and hoping for the best? These questions have led to a heated anthropological debate about the unintended consequences of striving to "do no harm." It is these unintended consequences that make the "do not harm" ethic so problematic.

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1.8– _Question_: *What would be an alternative approach than "doing no harm" that

might better benefit the Yanomami?*

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Anthropologists cannot transform many of the oppressive conditions under which their

informants exist. Still, there are ways they can help. It generally comes down to finding a

balance between what the group the anthropologist is working with wants and what the

anthropologist can reasonably do – given his or her resources. But here I want to focus on the

specifics of the Yanomami case. How could anthropologists positively help the Yanomami?

   The basic answer – that did indeed help – was to listen to the request of their indigenous

   NGO and their most prominent spokesperson, Davi Kopenawa. There was a lot that could not

   be done. Anthropologists cannot transform many of the oppressive conditions under which

   the Yanomami exist. Anthropologists lacked the power and money to prevent the

   encroachment of gold miners onto Yanomami lands. They could not stop the spread of the

   deadly diseases ravaging the group with an abundance of expensive medical supplies. But

   they could make an effort to help the Yanomami – to "do good" – in terms specified by the

   Yanomami. The Center for a Public Anthropology was asked to help in the following project

   by Bruce Albert, a French-Brazilian anthropologist working closely with Hutukara, the

   Yanomami's NGO, and with Davi Kopenawa. The problem, in the specific case discussed

   below, is that doing good involved its own complications. It entailed more than a decade of

   persistent determination to overcome various obstacles.

   Let me explain. Blood samples were collected from the Yanomami during the late 1960s by

   an American research team that included James Neel, a famous geneticist, and Napoleon

Chagnon, the just discussed anthropologist. Unbeknownst to the Yanomami, the blood samples were subsequently stored at a number of American institutions, most prominently at Penn State. The Yanomami only discovered this fact following the publication of Patrick Tierney's *Darkness in El Dorado* in 2000. Tierney wrote the Yanomami blood samples were stored "in an old refrigerator at Penn State University."

For the Yanomami, this was, deeply upsetting. Many felt it was a religious sacrilege to retain, rather than return, the samples so their deceased relative's blood could be buried in accord with Yanomami tradition. Moreover, the Yanomami had been promised their blood samples would be used to learn more about diseases ravaging them. (They were collected, it should be noted, in the midst of a measles epidemic.) This did not occur. A few researchers used the samples for their personal research. But, judging from the publications produced over the more than forty years the samples were stored at various institutions, they were not widely studied nor were they ever used in a way that directly benefitted the Yanomami.

Apparently, for some of the researchers – who must have known about the Yanomami concern for returning the blood rather than storing it – "doing no harm" meant not telling the Yanomami so as not to upset them. It also helped certain researchers. It meant there was no demand for the blood samples to be returned – thereby allowing them to be used, if desired, in future research projects.

Davi Kopenawa, a prominent Yanomami leader in Brazil, first learned about his relatives' blood samples being stored in the United States from Bruce Albert during a conversation about Tierney's book. The Pro Yanomami Commission (CCPY), working with Kopenawa, brought the matter to the federal attorney of the MPF (Federal Public Ministry) residing in Roraima, the state where most of the Brazilian Yanomami live. In 2002, Deputy Attorney Ela Wiecko Volkmer de Castilho corresponded with Dr. Kenneth Weiss, who was storing Penn

States' samples. But Weiss was not open to sending the blood samples back to Brazil. In 2005, another Deputy Attorney, Mauricio Frabretti, wrote to Weiss as well as Dean Susan Welsh of Penn State and Dr. Gerald Sonnenfeld, Binghamton University's Vice President for Research. Once more, little happened. The requests from prominent Brazilian government officials were basically ignored in a polite but condescending manner.

What altered Penn State's response in 2006 was partly a matter of timing and partly the involvement of students working with the Center for a Public Anthropology. Emails from these students to Weiss had little effect. But a formal letter to Penn State's President, Dr. Graham Spanier, from the Center combined with student letters supported by scores of other students from across North America did have a positive impact. The Provost, Dr. Erickson, agreed to return the blood samples. The letters arrived when Penn State was having its funding reviewed, under contentious circumstances, by the Pennsylvania General Assembly. (The Center's letter made reference to pursuing the matter with the General Assembly if necessary.)

At roughly this same time, Dr. Joseph Fraumeni, the director of the National Cancer Institute's (NCI) Division of Cancer Epidemiology and Genetics, in correspondence with Deputy Attorney Fabretti, indicated the Institute was "willing to return the [blood] specimens to Yanomami representatives." Knowing this, Provost Erickson suggested that Penn State's transfer of the blood "could ideally take place at the same time and under the same circumstances" as the NCI's.

But what seemed reasonable at first, became problematic. While Dr. Fraumenini's assistant, Dr. Pitt, made a significant effort to facilitate the return of the samples, others – at NCI, at Penn State, and in Brazil – obstructed the process, at times spreading false rumors.

It remained unclear for several years who or what was delaying the return of the blood samples. At the core of the problem was a NCI lawyer who, while insisting on remaining anonymous to the Center and students, was demanding the Brazilian government sign a formal legal agreement waiving all liability and warranties against the NCI for storing the blood. This American legal tactic puzzled the Brazilian authorities. They were not sure what they were consenting to and hesitated signing an agreement that seem to imply the NCI might be hiding some liability. Deputy Attorney of Brazil, Mr. Antonio Morimoto, suggested, as a compromise, the blood samples be turned over to the Brazilian Embassy in Washington, D.C. But Penn State and the National Cancer Institute refused.

Given this situation, those wanting the blood returned had only one option – to pressure the parties involved to reach an agreement. In the United States, the Center for a Public Anthropology repeatedly contacted key figures, assisted Deputy Attorney Morimoto in his efforts when it could, and sought to attract media attention. On the Brazilian side, returning the blood samples became a priority for the Hutukara Yanomami Association (HAY), a Yanomami NGO created in 2004 with CCPY assistance, and partner organizations, especially the Instituto Socioambiental (ISA) (that in 2007 absorbed CCPY). Davi Kopenawa, HAY's president, played a key role in keeping the issue alive, encouraging articles in Brazilian, French, and British media.

Ultimately, the Brazilian pressure was key. Through multiple meetings with the Federal Public Ministry's (MPF's) attorneys, ISA learned, quoting ISA's lawyer, Ana Paula Caldeira Souto Maior: that several "Brazilian government agencies were brought to the case due to the requirements made by the contacted American institutions . . . [relating to] a Biological Material Transfer Agreement. Besides the Foreign Ministry, ANVISA [Brazil's FDA equivalent], and the AGU [the Attorney General of Brazil] were also involved [because of American concerns over] . . . the safety conditions and the final destination of the samples." Finally, "MPF was able to solve the bureaucratic obstacles on the Brazilian side and, through clarifying conversations with the American Institutions, felt able to sign the Agreement for the return of the samples

insisted upon by the Americans."

In April 2015, Pennsylvania State University returned their blood samples, 2693 vials. In September 2015, the National Cancer Institute returned their samples, 474 vials. The transfer of the samples back to the Yanomami was positively highlighted in the Brazilian media, Brazilian government reports, and British media.

It should be noted that none of the rumored dangers emphasized by the transfer's opponents – which made the transfers such a complicated legal matter – ever came to pass, either in terms of spreading disease or the Yanomami suing American institutions. Instead, the return of the blood samples was a deeply moving moment for many Yanomami. One can listen to Davi Kopenawa's positive comments regarding the return of the samples in a video.(http://g1.globo.com/videos/v/lider-yanomami-davi-kopenawa-fala-sobre-sangue-entrgue-pelo- ministerio-publico/4483564/)

In brief then, the North American anthropology students and the Center played an important role in facilitating the return of the blood samples. Neither the Yanomami nor the Brazilian Deputy Attorneys could effectively pressure American research institutions to return the blood samples. The students and the Center could. The positive result – the "doing good" for the Yanomami – came about through all of the groups, working together over time. (For more detailed references and copies of documents, see http://center-yanomami.publicanthropology.org/).

Summary: Anthropologists cannot transform many of the oppressive conditions under which their informants live. Still, as this case demonstrates, they can assist indigenous groups with projects these groups deem culturally important. This section tracks the Yanomami efforts to gain the return of their relative's blood samples – deemed religiously important – stored in American research institutions. American anthropology students and the Center for a Public Anthropology played an important role in pressuring these institutions to return the blood samples. When the transference of the samples to Yanomami turned complicated, they sought to assist Brazilian authorities where appropriate. Clearly, "doing good" in this case, though complicated, resulted in a positive outcome for the Yanomami. It helped the Yanomami in a way they very much wanted assistance.

Readers interested in obtaining additional details regarding the subjects covered in this chapter as well as the more than 120 references drawn on are encouraged to refer to: http://www.publicanthropology.org/WaPA/r.pdf

CHAPTER 2

The Power of Cultural Anthropology to
Address the World's Problems[1]

Introduction: **In Chapter 1, I suggested that cultural anthropology has the potential to change**

the world. More precisely phrased, I mean using cultural anthropology's toolkit – participant-

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[1] This chapter uses two types of documentation for references and quotes. The first presents the links as footnotes on the page where the reference exists. The second uses the http://www.publicanthropology.org/WaPA/r.pdf *link to provide the reference. After clicking this link, simply search for a phrase or quote in the reference you are looking for. The reason for the two references is because the latter are the original references; the former are references for updated material in the education section to make this section more relevant to students.* If you find any of these links do not work, please notify me at borofsky@publicanthropology.org . Unfortunately, one or two "disappeared" in the past year (sigh).

observation contextual understanding, and comparison – anthropologists and non-anthropologists alike can effectively address major social problems. To make this point, Chapter 2 examines three case studies. The first deals with the cost and uncertain results of higher education in Canada and the United States. It asks: How might North American higher education be reformed so students can gain the career skills they need at a lower cost? The second with the trillions spent on foreign aid with, at best, mixed results. It asks: Is there a better way to spend this money with more positive outcomes? The third considers where the American military went wrong in Vietnam and later Iraq. It asks: Could these conflicts have been more effectively resolved without the high loss of life and the wasting of billions? Sound interesting?

As readers move through the chapter, they will see a point highlighted in Chapter 1 – the gap between cultural anthropology's potential and its actual practice. Thousands of cultural anthropologists – in one form or another, operating under one label or another – have sought to address social problems beyond the parochial concerns of the discipline. I would speculate that these anthropologists represent perhaps 10 to 15 percent of the field, a sizable minority. Cultural anthropology certainly has its share of individuals seeking to make a difference beyond the university, beyond the academy.

The unfortunate part of this positive statement is that these anthropologists tend to focus on narrowly defined problems in specific locales, or they write in forms of "academese" that is only partially intelligible to general readers. They are infrequently cited in the case studies below because they have not sought to develop "big picture" perspectives of major social concerns in ways that help a broad range of readers appreciate the dynamics at work. They

could. This chapter discusses the potential of participant-observation and contextual understanding to facilitate transparency and accountability in major institutions. It emphasizes the power of comparison to illuminate the key dynamics behind critical social concerns. Cultural anthropologists could use the field's tool to effectively address critical issues in important ways. But as noted, anthropology is embedded in social contexts that do not encourage such efforts. Rather than becoming recognized public figures concerned with addressing important problems – as Paul Farmer has – most cultural anthropologists are inclined to turn inward, publishing their analyses in modestly read anthropology journals in partially intelligible prose. The result, as we see in this chapter, is that others use cultural anthropology's tools to lead the charge for change.

The chapter highlights important ways to move from talking about change to facilitating it. We perceive the importance of circulating information widely – beyond the academy -- to encourage social accountability. The figures cited below have all had their books prominently discussed in the national and international media. That is what made Franz Boas and Margaret Mead effective in times past and what makes Paul Farmer effective today. They were (or are) able to repeatedly get their message across to a broad array of citizens and decision-makers.

Let me offer a brief overview of what follows. The first case study deals with Canadian and American higher education. Through a study of the contextual dynamics at work in higher education, it suggests why college costs so much and why students may graduate without the skills needed for successful careers. Using a comparison of Canadian and American systems of higher education, it suggests ways that students in both countries can

navigate their educational systems to bring college costs down while gaining needed career skills.

The second case study considers why the over two trillion dollars spent on foreign aid by the West in recent decades – the figure cited by William Easterly in *The White Man's Burden* – has been less successful than hoped at improving Third World living standards. It uses contextual understanding to explore why good intentions have frequently failed. It then turns to comparison to offer new ways for framing aid efforts. For many projects, the problem revolves around the way accountability is measured. The focus is on spending money rather than on evaluating what does and doesn't work to help those in need.

The third case study focuses on two American military involvements: the Vietnam War and the U.S. government's efforts in Iraq after the 2003 war. In both cases the American government emphasized military might over cultural understanding. This caused significant loss of life (in Vietnam), and the wasting of billions of dollars (in Vietnam and Iraq). With their skills in contextual understanding, anthropologists were in a position to provide information that could conceivably have reframed the American military strategy at a critical moment in the Vietnam War – thereby saving thousands of lives. We can only look back with regret at this missed opportunity. Using comparison, the case study concludes with reflections on how and when anthropologists can bring transparency and accountability to military and administrative efforts gone awry.

Each case study involves two sections. The first sets out the problems being addressed. The second then demonstrates how the tools of cultural anthropology can prove instrumental in addressing them.

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2.1 – Questions: **What difficulties are students in the United States and Canada facing that**

significantly affect their career prospects after college?

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In assessing the current costs of higher education in the United States and Canada, let me

focus on five points regarding the contexts students now find themselves in. Reading

through the research, it is clear many university students are coping with a fairly stressful

financial situation as they proceed through college and then, hopefully, on to a meaningful

and successful career. The first three points will probably sound familiar to you. In a sense,

you become a participant-observer because they discuss problems you are likely experiencing

yourself. You are not only participating and observing concerns that confront you and your

fellow students, but the section provides the contextual data to help you make better sense

of them. You are using cultural anthropology's tools to address a significant problem you

currently face.

<u>First</u>, there is no doubt that a college degree affects one's earning power. In respect to the

United States, NPR (National Public Radio) reports, "A new study shows college graduates

have fared much better in the economic recovery than those without a degree. The

Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce reports that nearly all of the

jobs recovered since the economic downturn have required a post-secondary degree. And

despite the struggles of many recent graduates, workers with college degrees still enjoy a

substantial wage benefit over those with only a high school education."[2] The New York Times

adds: "The pay gap between college graduates and everyone else reached a record high last

year, according to the new data, which is based on an analysis of Labor Department statistics

by the Economic Policy Institute in Washington. Americans with four-year college degrees

made 98 percent more an hour on average in 2013 than people without a degree. That's up

from 89 percent five years earlier, 85 percent a decade earlier and 64 percent in the early

1980s."[3]

Developing this point further, the Washington Post recently reported:

Although the working-class and college-educated start their adult lives with roughly

similar incomes, the earnings for those with college educations begin to soar soon after

they enter the workforce, while earnings for those with only a high school education

leveled off much earlier, according to a report released Wednesday by Sentier Research, a

firm led by former census officials, that analyzed outcomes for white men from 1996 to

2014. The report also found that the gap in fortunes between the college-educated and

those with high school degrees or the equivalent has widened dramatically in the past 20

years. Adjusted for inflation, white working-class men earned more from 1978 to 1996

than they did from 1996 to 2014, while earnings for college graduates rose during that

period.[4]

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[2] https://www.npr.org/2012/08/15/158887989/study-college-degree-holds-its-value
[3] http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/27/upshot/is-college-worth-it-clearly-new-data-say.html?_r=0)
[4] https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/white-working-class-men-increasingly-falling-behind-as-college-becomes-the-norm/2016/10/05/95610130-8a51-11e6-875e-2c1bfe943b66_story.html?wpisrc=nl_rainbow&wpmm=1)

Related to this point, a study by the Pew Foundation found that "Most of those WITHOUT a college degree think they would be earning more money if they had one [and that] Most of those WITH a college degree think they would be earning less if they did not have one."[5]

In a research report the Urban Institute likewise emphasized this point though it added important qualifications: "Postsecondary education leads to significant financial benefits for most students, and average earnings premiums have grown over time. However, there is considerable variation in outcomes across individuals, types of credentials, occupations, and geographical locations."[6]

The same pattern holds in Canada. The CBC Business News reports: "Higher education still worth the money, new research suggests; Grads make more money in virtually every discipline, but gender gap remains."[7] Statistics Canada, in examining the cumulative earnings of postsecondary graduates over a 20-year period, reports:

Bachelor's degree and college graduates earned considerably more than did high school graduates. From 1991 to 2010, the median cumulative earnings (expressed in 2010 constant dollars) of male high school graduates amounted to $882,300 . . . In comparison, male college graduates earned about 1.3 times more ($1,137,000), and male bachelor's degree graduates earned about 1.7 times more ($1,517,200). Although women generally earned less than men did, the patterns were similar. Women with a bachelor's degree

[5] http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/value-of-college/).

[6] https://www.urban.org/research/publication/higher-education-earnings-premium-value-variation-and-trends).

[7] http://www.cbc.ca/news/business/university-college-degree-salary-1.3695254

earned $972,500 (about 2.1 times more than high school graduates), and those with a college certificate earned $643,200 (about 1.4 times more than high school graduates).

Postsecondary graduates' earnings also varied considerably across fields of study. For example, men with a bachelor's degree in Engineering earned $1,845,000 over the period, more than twice as much as Fine and Applied Arts graduates, who earned $843,900. Men with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration, Health, and Mathematics and Physical Sciences were also top earners; those who graduated with a degree in Humanities ranked relatively low (second behind Fine and Applied Arts graduates). he findings were generally similar for women with a bachelor's degree[8].

<u>Second</u>, fitting with the increased demand for higher education, there has been a considerable rise in the cost of a university education. The U.S. Government's National Center for Education Statistics notes while the average cost of tuition, fees, room and board was $9,620 in 1983, in 2013-14, it was $21,003[9]. Bloomberg reports "college tuition and fees have surged 1,120 percent since records began in 1978, four times faster than the increase in the consumer price index"[10].   Based on data recently reported by the College Board, Money reports that:

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[8] http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-626-x/11-626-x2014040-eng.htm

[9] https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_330.10.asp

[10]

https://books.google.com/books?id=RqypCwAAQBAJ&pg=PT20&lpg=PT20&dq=%22college+tuition+and+fees+have+surged+1,120+percent+since+records+began+in+1978,+four+times+faster+than+the+increase+in+the+consumer+price+index%22&source=bl&ots=HIc2C9_8Re&sig=ClOghpUrTL__T50eCTtPOxTmWUw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj9u_H7xtzcAhX6IjQIHeulCjoQ6AEwAHoECAEQAQ#v=onepage&q=%22college%20tuition%20and%20fees%20have%20surged%201%2C120%20percent%20since%20records%20began%20in%201978%2C%20four%20times%20faster%20than%20the%20increase%20in%20the%20consumer%20price%20index%22&f=false

The average published tuition for in-state students at <u>public universities</u>[11] – which represent 45% of full-time undergraduates – rose to $9,410 this year, up 2.9% from last year. And the total cost of an <u>in-state public university</u>[12] (including room, board, books, travel, and miscellaneous expenses) hit $24,061, up $651 or 2.8% from last year. Since more than 70% of full-time students get at least some grant or scholarship money, and most families can take advantage of the $2,500 <u>American Opportunity Tax Credit</u>,[13] the net cost for a typical student living on campus at a public university is estimated to be about $18,620, up 3.2% from last year.

The increases at <u>private colleges</u>—where 20% of full-time undergraduates study–were even greater. The total published or "sticker" price hit $47,831, up $1,560 or 3.4%. Since more than 80% of private college students get grants from the schools, the net price families are paying to send a child to a private college this year averaged just $30,300. Unfortunately, that net price is up 4.8% from last year[14].

For Canada, Huff Post Business Canada recently reported on a Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Quoting the study: "on average, tuition and compulsory fees for Canadian undergraduate students have tripled between 1993-94 and 2015-16 and will continue to rise over the next four years." Huff Post continues "This increase ranges from 35 per cent in Newfoundland and Labrador to 248 per cent in Ontario"[15]. Global News Canada notes "The

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[11] http://time.com/money/best-colleges/rankings/best-public-colleges/
[12] http://time.com/money/4097089/college-tuition-cost-differences-state-live/
[13] http://time.com/money/3707005/best-college-tax-break-aotc/?iid=sr-link3
[14] http://time.com/money/4098683/college-board-tuition-cost-rose-inflation-2015/
[15] http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2015/09/09/ccpa-canadian-tuition-fees-increase_n_8112118.html

average tuition for a four-year bachelor's degree now tops $5,572, according to the Canadian Federation of Students (who's stats are based on Statistics Canada data and internal projections). That's an increase of more than 67 per cent versus what the average degree or a four-year college program cost in 2000 (it was $3,328 annually)"[16]. For those interested, Macleans magazine provides offers a chart of how Canadian tuition fees have changed, province by province, over the past five years[17]. Referring to the same report cited above by Huff Post, Macleans suggests "university tuition could rise by as much as 13 per cent over the next four years."

    Third, as might reasonably be expected, the significant increase in college costs has also lead to a significant rise in college debt. Market Watch indicates: "It's getting harder and harder to graduate college without taking on student loans. Nearly 70% of bachelor's degree recipients leave school with debt, according to the White House, and that could have major consequences for the economy. Research indicates that the $1.2 trillion in student loan debt may be preventing Americans, from making the kinds of big purchases that drive economic growth, like house and cars, and reaching other milestones, such as having the ability to save for retirement or move out of mom and dad's basement"[18]. CNBC observes: "The numbers are staggering: more than $1.2 trillion in outstanding student loan debt, 40 million borrowers, an average balance of $29,000"[19]. Looking at a ten year trend from 2004-2014, The Institute for College Access & Success reports: "Average debt at graduation rose 56 percent, from $18,550 to $28,950, more than double the rate of inflation (25%) over this 10-year period.

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[16] http://globalnews.ca/news/1513678/a-look-at-the-rise-of-tuition-costs-and-student-debt-in-canada/

[17] http://www.macleans.ca/interactive-how-canadian-tuition-fees-have-changed-in-the-last-5-years-by-province/

[18] http://www.marketwatch.com/story/americas-growing-student-loan-debt-crisis-2016-01-15

[19] http://www.cnbc.com/2015/06/15/the-high-economic-and-social-costs-of-student-loan-debt.html

The rate of growth varied widely between states. While the majority of states saw the average debt of new graduates with loans rise two to three times faster than inflation, in five states it grew even faster—at more than triple the inflation rate, and in four states the growth was at or below the inflation rate. Borrowing levels almost certainly would have grown faster were it not for increased grant aid during this 10-year period. Still, the costs students and families have to cover—after subtracting any grants they receive—have outpaced their ability to pay, particularly for lower income students"[20].

The national consequences of such debt are serious. A headline in the Los Angeles Times states "**Soaring student loan debt poses risk to nation's future economic growth**" [21].   Mitch Daniels, president of Purdue University and former Republican governor of Indiana, suggests, as a result of student debt, college graduates "are postponing marriage, childbearing and home purchases, and . . . evidently limiting the percentage of young people who start a business or try to do something entrepreneurial . . . Every citizen and taxpayer should be concerned about it"[22]. Emphasizing the importance of completing college (versus dropping out before graduation), the College Board reports in Trends in Student Aid 2015: "among borrowers who entered repayment in 2011-12, 9% of those who completed their programs and 24% of those who did not graduate defaulted on their student loans within two years of entering repayment"[23].

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[20] http://ticas.org/sites/default/files/pub_files/classof2014.pdf
[21] http://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-student-debt-20150906-story.html
[22] http://www.cnbc.com/2015/06/15/the-high-economic-and-social-costs-of-student-loan-debt.html
[23] https://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/trends-student-aid-web-final-508-2.pdf

Similarly, in Canada, CBC News indicates "**Average student debt difficult to pay off, delays life milestones**"[24]. **Fitting with this, the Financial Post states** "The average university student leaves campus with close to $28,000 in debt, and takes an average of 14 years to pay it off based on an average starting salary of $39,523"[25]. Huff Post Business Canada reports "According to <u>Statistics Canada's Survey of Financial Security</u>[26], released last week, student debt grew 44.1 per cent from 1999 to 2012, or 24.4 per cent between 2005 and 2012. In all, one in eight Canadian families are carrying student debt, with a median value of about $10,000, StatsCan reported. There was a total $28.3 billion in outstanding student debt in 2012, the survey found." While it may not help, the article goes on to note, "Canadian students' debt burden '<u>pales in comparison with the U.S.</u>' writes BMO economist Sal Guatieri, noting that south of the border, student debt grew 110 per cent between 2005 and 2012, to almost $1 trillion" by 2014.[27]

<u>Fourth</u>, getting a well-paying job following graduation now seems increasingly difficult. In the United States, a Bloomberg headline reports "**college graduates struggle to find employment worth a degree.**" It continues " Among 22-year-old degree holders who found jobs in the past three years, more than half were in roles not requiring a college diploma, said John Schmitt, a labor **economist for the Center for Economic and Policy Research in** Washington[28]. "While graduates today are more likely to get jobs, they're unlikely to get a job that they are qualified for or in their area of expertise," said Scott, whose company is called

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24 http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/average-student-debt-difficult-to-pay-off-delays-life-milestones-1.2534974
25 http://business.financialpost.com/personal-finance/student-debt-average-payback-takes-14-years
26 https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/140225/dq140225b-eng.htm
27 https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2014/03/04/student-debt-canada-statscan_n_4897125.html
28 https://www.bizjournals.com/bizjournals/video/42dGU3bjpSL8i2epzCWs3UV-4_xucNQj

Addo Institute. 'because it's such a buyer's market for employers, they get graduates who will work for less money and for more hours'"[29]. The Federal Reserve Bank of New York asks the question: "Are recent college graduates finding good jobs?" It answers "**According to numerous accounts, the Great Recession has left many recent college graduates struggling to find jobs that utilize their education. However, a look at the data on the employment outcomes for recent graduates over the past two decades suggests that such difficulties are not a new phenomenon: individuals just beginning their careers often need time to transition into the labor market. Still, the percentage who are unemployed or "underemployed"— working in a job that typically does not require a bachelor's degree—has risen, particularly since the 2001 recession. Moreover, the quality of the jobs held by the underemployed has declined, with today's recent graduates increasingly accepting low-wage jobs or working part-time" (vol 20, 1, 2014).**[30]

Canada represents a similar pattern. A Globe and Mail headline indicates "recent university grads increasingly jobless, study shows." It continues "Since 2006, unemployment for all university graduates has risen and their ability to find work related to their fields has dropped, shows this year's annual graduate survey released by the Council of Ontario Universities. When accounting for inflation, average salaries have also declined. In spite of the economic recovery, the wider labour market has seen the same lag in wage gains, one that economists are trying to understand. . . Before the 2008-2009 recession, humanities graduates had actually seen their earnings two years after graduation go up. But since a 2006

[29] https://www.newsmax.com/us/college-graduates-jobs/2014/06/05/id/575299/
[30] https://www.newyorkfed.org/medialibrary/media/research/current_issues/ci20-1.pdf

peak, they have declined. Outside of professional faculties like dentistry or medicine, computer science is one of the few disciplines where wage gains have been steady"[31].

Summing up the situation students face, CIBC (Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce) notes in an *In Focus* report that "the proportion of adults in Canada with a post-secondary education is the highest among all OECD countries, and the cost of that education is roughly double the OECD average. Yet, more and more of those degree holders fall behind in the earnings scale. The share of Canadian university graduates who make less than half the national median income is the largest among all OECD countries. Sure, on average it pays to get a post-secondary education, but with the education premium narrowing, the number of low income outliers is rising. And despite the overwhelming evidence that one's field of study is the most important factor determining labour market outcomes, today's students have not gravitated to more financially advantageous fields in a way that reflects the changing reality of the labour market"[32].

The <u>fifth</u> point deals with accountability: (a) What are students gaining from their college and university experiences? (b) Are they gaining skills they need to be employed in careers of their choice? (c) Are colleges and universities support systems of accountability that insure students do, indeed, gain the skills they need for successful and meaningful lives have spent so many years and resources at their schools?

Let us start with the initial question (a): What do students gain from the time and money spent on a college degree? The short answer is that we don't know. Writes Richard Hersh in

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[31] http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/education/recent-university-grads-increasingly-jobless-study-shows/article20357775/

[32] http://research.cibcwm.com/economic_public/download/if_2013-0826.pdf

Declining by Degrees: "Until now, no one has been able to measure with any accuracy what students actually learn during their four years on a campus." Hersh should know. He served as president of both Trinity College in Connecticut and Hobart and William Smith Colleges in New York as well as director of the Center for Moral Education at Harvard University.

The most comprehensive analysis of the subject is a two-volume work by Ernest Pascarella and Patrick Terenzini entitled *How College Affects Students.* (The first volume summarizes research up through the 1980s; the second volume covers more recent research.) Based on the analysis of thousands of studies, the authors conclude that as a result of college, "students learn to think in more abstract, critical, complex and reflective ways; there is a general liberalization of values and attitudes combined with an increase in cultural and artistic interests and activities; progress is made toward the development of personal identities and more positive self-concepts; and there is an expansion and extension of interpersonal horizons, intellectual interests, individual autonomy, and general psychological maturity and well-being."

Pascarella and Terenzini's conclusion that colleges promote intellectual and emotional growth sounds impressive. But there are two problems with this conclusion.

First, the studies focus on what students gain during their years at college. They don't compare what students gain at college with a control group of individuals who didn't go to college. As a result, we don't know whether individuals who instead chose to work or simply live away from home, grew in the same manner. Did the changes occur because of college or because of increasing maturity and/or from living away from home? Without control groups, we can't tell.

Second, while few doubt that significant intellectual and emotional changes occur in most students attending college – especially when they live away from home – Pascarella and Terenzini write "the gains made during the undergraduate years on various dimensions of academic learning and intellectual sophistication reflect only relative advantages of seniors over beginning students . . . College graduates as a group don't always perform particularly well in terms of absolute standards of knowledge acquisition or cognitive functioning."

Recent studies – which probably represent the most credible studies to date on the topic – are somewhat less positive than Pascarella and Terenzi. One of the most prominent is Arum and Roksa's *Academically Adrift* (University of Chicago Press, 2011). In respect to critical thinking, problem solving, and effective writing, they found among a number of universities perhaps 45% of college students "do not demonstrate any significant improvement in learning" during their first two years of college. In four years of college, 36% of the students "do not demonstrate any significant improvement in learning" in these areas (see Scott Jaschik, 'Academically Adrift' *Inside Higher Ed*, January 18, 2011). Students that do show improvement tend to demonstrate only modest improvement. The Wabash National Study (Ernest Pascarella and Patrick Terenzini "Some New Evidence on What Matters in Student Learning" Preliminary Address to CIC Institute, 2011 Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education) using a sample of small liberal arts colleges and a different, but another well respected, test came to roughly the same conclusion.

This fits with Derek Bok, the former president of Harvard, *Our Underachieving Colleges*: He states: "Most studies do show evidence of growth, but almost all the findings leave ample room for improvement. Even among the selective colleges that are ranked so highly . . . fewer

than half of the recent graduates believe that college contributed 'a great deal' to their competence in analytic and writing skills . . . Surveys of student progress . . . including writing, numeracy, and foreign language proficiency, indicate that only a minority of undergraduates improve substantially while some actually regress." Elsewhere in his book, which is subtitled *A Candid Look at How Much Students Learn and Why They Should be Learning More*, Bok writes: "Many seniors graduate without being able to write well enough to satisfy their [future] employers. Many can't reason clearly or perform competently in analyzing complex, nontechnical problems, even though faculties rank critical thinking as the primary goal of a college education." The *New York Times* recently reported that in a College Board survey of 120 leading corporations, one-third of the employees at these corporations wrote poorly and, further, that these companies were spending billions of dollars on remedial training, including training for new employees straight out of college.

The anthropologist Cathy Small, in her ethnography *My Freshman Year: What a Professor Learned by Becoming a Student*, writes: "While most students I interviewed readily admitted that they were in college to learn, they also made clear that classes, and work related to classes, were a minor part of what they were learning." More than anything, she observed, students learn time management skills – how to balance various demands. "Most seniors will agree that they've forgotten much of what they learned from classes, even from the semester before," she writes. "Looking back on college, they will claim to have learned more about themselves, their abilities, and their relationships than about subject areas."

Turning to the (b) question (under the fifth point above) – are students gaining skills they need to be employment in careers of their choice – the answer should likewise make students

uneasy. A recent Gallup survey indicating "just 14 percent of Americans – and only 11 percent of business leaders – strongly agreed that graduates have the necessary skills and competencies to succeed in the workplace" (Ibid.)   A related gap exists between student and employers. Another *Inside Higher Ed* reports "in a number of key areas (oral communication, written communication, critical thinking, being creative), students are more than twice as likely as employers to think that" they are well-prepared for their future career. In respect to critical/analytical thinking, for example, 66% of the students viewed themselves as prepared versus 26% of the employers, regarding written communication it was 65% versus 27%, and for analyzing/solving complex problems, it was 59% versus 24% (Scott Jaschik "Study finds big gaps between student and employer perceptions" *Inside Higher Ed* January 20. These data fit with an article in the *Economist* (Not what it used to be, Dec 1, 2012): During the current wave of unemployment, there are three million unfilled positions needing skilled workers.

This also fits with a joint study by The Chronicle of Higher Education and American Public Media's Marketplace conducted in 2012 entitled "The Role of Higher Education in Career Development: Employer Perceptions." [33]

• Thirty-one percent of employers indicated that recent graduates are unprepared or very unprepared for their job search.

• Over half of the employers indicated difficulty in finding qualified candidates for job openings.

• Among industry segments, Science/Technology and Media/Communications appear to struggle more than other industries in finding qualified candidates . . .

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[33] https://www.slideshare.net/MiGlobalTalent/employer-panel-lou-wassel3

• Additionally, these same two industry segments rated colleges and universities as "fair" to "poor" more frequently than other industries in terms of producing successful employees. Media/Communications also indicated, more than other industries, that students were unprepared or very unprepared for their job search.

• According to employers in the study, graduates can prepare better by researching the organization, followed by improving interview skills, and researching the industry. Only Media/Communications ranked the importance of preparing a better resume above interviewing skills, presumably because their concentration field tends to better prepare them in interviewing skills.

• Employers place more weight on experience, particularly internships and employment during school vs. academic credentials including GPA and college major when evaluating a recent graduate for employment. . . .

• When it comes to the skills most needed by employers, job candidates are lacking most in written and oral communication skills, adaptability and managing multiple priorities, and making decisions and problem solving.

• Employers place the responsibility on colleges to prepare graduates in written and oral communications and decision-making skills. Results indicate that colleges need to work harder to produce these traits in their graduates.

• While the gap between employer need and graduate skills narrows in the Media/Communications industry for written and oral skills, colleges have more of a challenge developing decision-making and technical skills in students geared toward this industry.

Finally, turning to the last question asked under the fifth point (c) – are colleges and universities supporting systems of accountability that insure students do, indeed, gain the skills they need for successful and meaningful lives have spent so many years and resources at their schools – the answer tends to be less than positive. There is a clear record of federal and state governments seeking to insure students gain the career and life skills they need. *A Test of Leadership, Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*, the 2006 report of the commission appointed by former Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, p. 4 states:

> We believe that improved accountability is vital to ensuring the success of all the other reforms we propose. Colleges and universities must become more transparent about cost, price, and student success outcomes, and must willingly share this information with students and families. Student achievement, which is inextricably connected to institutional success, must be measured by institutions on a "value-added" basis that takes into account students' academic baseline when assessing their results.[34]

Secretary Spelling sought to impose these changes on colleges and universities through increasing the power and requirements of regional accrediting boards. Schools that fail their accreditations, that fail to live up to these boards' requirements, have their federal funding withdrawn – often forcing such schools to close.

State governments have put pressure on their public universities. (A majority of the student population attend public universities.) We can track this pressure through some of *The Chronicle of Higher Education's* articles. A November 28, 2010 headline (by Sara Hebel) notes "States Seeks Ways to Take Measure of College Degrees;" an October 28, 2013 headline

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[34] https://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/reports/pre-pub-report.pdf

reports "States Demand That Colleges Show How Well Their Students Learn" by Dan Berrett. A nine state consortium, focusing on critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, and writing, this latter article notes, would like to "have a clear, understandable way to describe learning [in college]."

How did colleges respond to these challenges? In a 2011 interview former U.S. Secretary of Education Spellings was asked: "*The commission found that higher education in the United States needs to improve in 'dramatic ways,' changing from a system primarily based on reputation to one based on performance. Has this happened?*" She answered "Not enough. . . . clearly the pace has been too slow." Secretary Spellings continues "Are we doing a better job of measuring student-learning outcomes? . . . A baby-step better."[35]

A *Chronicle* article from February 1, 2008 reads "Colleges Emerge the Clear Winner in Battle Over Accreditation." It continues: "If the accreditation battles of the past year had been a boxing match, the referees probably would declare American colleges the winner by a technical knockout. The latest example is the victory the colleges have secured in a fight with accreditors themselves over proposed legislative language. The outcome appears to have removed the institutions' last major obstacle to asserting their right to define academic success. . . . after weeks of intensive negotiations, the colleges and the accreditors have reached a settlement. The result? They agreed to . . . [give] colleges the authority to set the terms of their own academic evaluations. The compromise language does give the accreditors the right to suggest some measures, like faculty qualifications or student test results, by which the colleges will be judged. But, according to participants in the talks, the

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[35] https://www.chronicle.com/article/Q-A-Former-Secretary-of/129065

new language also makes clear that in the case of disagreements, the colleges would retain final authority."

This helps explain why, despite earnest attempts made, graduates continue to display limited learning from their years at college. Again, *Chronicle* headlines are instructive. A January 21, 2014 headline reads "Colleges Measure Learning in More Ways, but Seldom Share Results." The article, based on a report of over 1,200 college administrators, notes "assessment results seldom leave the campus, the researchers found. Less than one-third of colleges post such results on their websites. . . . the use of evidence was not as pervasive as it needed to be." Another April 21, 2014 headline reads "Colleges Back Away From Using Tests to Assess Student Learning." It states, "feeling pressure from federal policy makers and the public to demonstrate rigor in their courses, colleges turned to the tests as seemingly objective measures of quality and what students are learning." It continues "But then momentum slowed. A leading advocacy group for the disclosure of student-learning outcomes quietly closed. Another project has seen flagging interest. Researchers have cast doubt on the reliability of some standardized measures of learning . . . professors have become more interested in tools that allow them to standardize their assessment of their students' performance on homegrown assignments instead of using outside tests."

We see this clearly with President Obama's "scorecard." As the Chronicle of Higher Education notes "Education Department and at the White House . . . [sought] to test the limits of federal power over a sector that often strenuously resists accountability and vigorously guards its independence." The President pushed "for a ratings system that would

tie federal aid to certain performance measures, such as graduation rates, was scuttled amid concerns about limitations in the government's data. The administration settled instead on a consumer-oriented college scorecard, which includes new information about post-college earnings at individual institutions." The reason it was unable to gain further data to make comparisons among various schools regarding what students learned and did with their educations is because, "Congress's 2008 'unit record' ban, which forbade any federal attempt to track individual students through college and beyond. Many of the very college presidents who criticized the ratings plan for flawed data had supported the unit-record ban" as did key higher-education associations[36]. One might well conclude key administrators and educational lobbying groups, whatever the public's concern for accountability regarding what students learn, remain committed to resisting real accountability regarding student learning.

These data focus on the United States. I have less data on Canada since most of the above data comes from The Chronicle of Higher Education and Inside Higher Ed, both American publications. It appears the Canadian Universities are increasingly taking the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) seriously and, importantly, making many of their scores public. (More American schools take NSSE, but fewer make their results public.) What is NSSE? Maclean's provides a reasonable summary in its survey of Canadian higher education:

With NSSE, approximately 100 questions are designed to evaluate best educational practices such as student-faculty interaction, collaborative learning and supportive campus environments, and give feedback to schools. How often have students attended

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[36] http://www.chronicle.com/article/Obama-s-Legacy-An-Unlikely/237885

an arts performance in the past year? How much of their course work emphasizes memorization? How often have they prepared two or more drafts of a paper before turning it in? How often do they ask another student for help with course material? How often have they had discussions with people of a different race? A different economic background? A different religious belief?[37]

Without doubt, NSSE offers a standard for assessing to what degree students are seriously engaged in intellectual challenges at a university. The implication is that if students are assigned certain tasks, if certain demands are placed on them, they will develop key higher order thinking skills. The problem is that it is not clear that indeed this holds true because there are no further tests across the schools involved to see what higher thinking skills – such as critical thinking and problem solving as well as writing – students who have taken NSSE actually possess. It is only assumed. NSSE is frequently used to foster curriculum changes and indeed this is happening in Canada. But to what effect remains unclear. We are still unclear exactly what learning takes place in Canadian institutions of higher education and to what degree they provide students with the key skills they need for successful careers and meaningful lives. We only have a suggestive beginning for measuring student learning.

Summary: Five problems impede students in the United States and Canada gaining the education they need and can afford: (1) While it is critical to gain a college degree, (2) university tuition has significantly risen in recent decades (3) leading to increasingly high

[37] http://www.macleans.ca/education/unirankings/national-survey-of-student-engagement-a-truer-measure-of-quality/

levels of debt. (4) Not only is it now harder to gain a well-paying, meaningful position following graduation – to allow students to pay off their debt and proceed with advancing their life goals – but (5) it remains unclear what significant skills students are gaining at their universities. Universities frequently shy away from a system of accountability that would highlight what students do, and do not, gain from their years at college.

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2.2 – Questions: **How might you, as a student, applying anthropology's tools of participant-observation, contextual analysis, and comparison, find a way forward given the problems highlighted in Section 2.1? It is unclear if, working with others, students can significantly transform higher education in either the United States or Canada. But they might well develop a path through the maze that they and other students can follow to lessen the difficulties. What would such a path look like? Which of the four suggestions listed here do you think might work best for you?**

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There is no easy answer to these questions. But let me suggest four strategies to ponder and, perhaps, use to build your own. With the tools of cultural anthropology, you and others might be able to navigate through the current maze of problems that confront university students.

First, given the role higher education has now assumed in shaping people's future prospects, it would likely prove worthwhile to think through what you hope to achieve at school. Traditionally, the years spent at university have represented, in the terms of Van

Gennep – a prominent Dutch-German-French anthropologist in the early 20th century – a *rite of passage*. It constitutes a time after you had been raised by your parents at home and before you proceed forward as an adult in the wider world. University has tended to represent a liminal state – between two concrete roles. It has, certainly up to now, involved considerable socializing, for many drinking, perhaps dabbling with various drugs, exploring the possibility of sexual experiences, and, in general, while experimenting with a range of possible alternatives to what you practice at home with your parents, having a good time.

This liminal perspective worked well before students had to go into significant debt to complete their degrees and deal with the uncertainty of whether or not they might you might gain a meaningful, well paid job following graduation. However, higher education has changed significantly in the past 20 years. The question is whether you can change as well to adapt to these changes.

Treating higher education as a casual, fun experience – in the pattern noted by Cathy Small – certainly remains common today. But you might ask yourself if you will, in the process, gain the technical and life skills you need to proceed with a career and a reasonably meaningful, happy adult life. Students often are unclear exactly they want to do when they graduate. But that should not stop them from asking hard questions about what they want to achieve at university and what is the best way to achieve these goals. As freshman students, quite likely, will not know the answers to such questions. But that should not stop them from asking them nor seeking to answer them as best they can as they gain more knowledge and experience. Basically, it means changing your attitude for being at university. It means seriously planning ahead so, when you are graduated, you will be prepared for a

more difficult world than previous generations had to face. It does not mean you cannot have fun or explore various possibilities. But it does mean you need to plan for your future after you graduate. You cannot stay at university in a liminal state forever.

Second, despite the hype of many high-status universities – universities I would note that often do not embrace accountability standards that demonstrate their students learn more than at other institutions – students can likely get a good solid education at a range of schools, often at a considerably less cost than these elite universities. If you are hurting financially, you might seriously consider transferring to another school where, as the following material emphasizes, you can still get a high-quality education but at a lower cost.

Based on thousands of studies, Pascarella and Terenzini write: "Clearly, the 3,000-plus postsecondary institutions in the United States differ substantially in size, [and] complexity. . . . Yet, with some notable exceptions, the weight of evidence . . . casts considerable doubt on the premise that the substantial structural, resource, and qualitative differences among postsecondary institutions produce correspondingly large differences in net educational effects on students. Rather, the great majority of postsecondary institutions appear to have surprisingly similar net impacts on student growth."

Social critic Andrew Hacker makes the point this way: "I am . . . convinced that despite differences in endowment and faculty salaries, as good an education can be had at Coe College in Iowa, Whitman College in Washington, and Knox College in Illinois as at brand-name schools like Williams and Swarthmore."

Some readers may wish to dispute this conclusion. Yet, if various "brand-name schools" (to borrow Andrew Hacker's phrase) were interested in demonstrating that their added cost

resulted in added educational value, one would think they would be open to cross-campus accountability studies that assess what students do and don't learn at their schools.

Most elite schools strenuously opposed the efforts made by former U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings to carry out just such accountability studies. If there were tests that allowed students to compare what was gained at one school versus another in terms of education and later employment, then schools would have to compete on cost and effectiveness, not just image, prestige, and mystique.

Two educational researchers using controlled samples (so as to avoid differences in intellectual ability) report that "students who attended more selective colleges do not earn more than other students who . . . attended less selective colleges." (A recent *Wall Street Journal* article reaching a different conclusion did not use controlled samples and, hence, was likely measuring other variables.) The two researchers indicate that "the payoff to attending an elite college appears to be greater for students from more disadvantaged backgrounds." But as we have noted, few disadvantaged students currently attend elite colleges.

This analysis fits with other data. To quote from a Hacker article in the *New York Review of Books*: Referring to a consulting firm's compendium of the educational backgrounds of CEOs at the nation's 500 largest companies: "It turns out that only 13 of . . . [the CEOs] didn't attend or finish college. . . . Another 8 are heirs to family enterprises . . . leaving 479 who had completed college and more or less ascended on their own. Altogether, 68 of the 479 – 14 percent – were graduates of 12 highly competitive colleges [such as Amherst, Brown, Harvard, Yale, and Stanford] . . . [The vast majority of the] chief executives went to less prestigious schools like Worcester Polytechnic, Marymount College, and Idaho State. . . .

while an Ivy League degree may help in the early years of a career, its cachet tends to fade when more stringent tests are set."

It probably comes down to a matter of confidence. Do you need to go to a high status school – with its high costs – to feel you are competent or can you, instead, focus on getting the key skills you need for a much lower cost at an institution with slightly less status? How you answer that question will likely shape how you proceed in your first decade after graduation. American students can look at the U.S. Government's College Scorecard [38]to explore the alternative possibilities that exist.

<u>Third</u>, students need to start early – ideally late in their first year – to explore their career options following graduation. Waiting until the final semester, as some do, means you will be generally unprepared for charting a positive, successful course following graduation. Many of the "horror stories" students read about college graduates could then, quite possibly, happen to you. There is much you can during your years at university to prepare. Here are three suggestive strategies. See if any feel appropriate to you

<u>A</u> . Given your interests and financial needs, you should explore what reasonable options exist for you following graduation. Can you find careers that feel meaningful and enjoyable as well as still help not only pay off your university debt but fund your living expenses?

You might think that the first step in this process involves selecting a major. Actually, "The Role of Higher Education in Career Development: Employer Perceptions" (discussed above) indicates "only 19% of employers look for specific majors and do not consider candidates without them, while the majority – 78% will consider any major." In terms of

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[38] https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/

specifics, the report states "executives are least interested in looking for candidates with specific majors (14%) than Managers (19%) and HR (19%). Employers from Science/Technology (29%) and Health Care (29%) look for specific majors more so than other industries when considering a job candidate. Services/Retail and Business industries are more flexible when it comes to a graduate's major (only 7% and 12%, respectively, requiring specific majors)."[39] While faculty in various departments – looking to increase their majors – may stress the value of their major for future careers, employees generally do not. They are primarily important if you are going to graduate school which, of course, are many faculty members' general focus. (Few faculty members have had jobs outside of academia.)

The former president of Harvard, Derek Bok raises significant questions about the role majors currently play in higher education. Quoting him (2006:136):

Originally students had to complete only a few courses in their chosen field of concentration. Over time, as faculties grew in size and disciplines acquired more and more subspecialties, requirements for the major expanded to occupy one-third or even one-half of all of all classes students were required to graduate. . . [There is a] tendency of some departments to require more courses than are actually needed to give students the experience of pursuing a subject with rigor and depth. This goal can almost certainly be achieve in most fields with little more than the equivalent of a year's study. . . heavy requirements may please department faculty by justifying more courses of the kind they like to teach . . . But the heavy demands involved not only keep many students from choosing other courses they would rather take, they also make it difficult to find room in

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[39] http://www.chronicle.com/items/biz/pdf/Employers%20Survey.pdf

the curriculum for other important aims of undergraduate education, such as preparing students as citizens, providing for their moral development, or ensuring adequate breadth of study. . . What is hard to justify is a requirement that forces all concentrators to use more than, say, one-third of their entire program to fulfill an education goal that could be achieved with few courses.

B . In exploring various career options, it is important conduct your own research – reading not only the literature but also writing and/or taking to specific employers in various fields of interest. You should gain a sense of what various careers tend to involve, whether the demands placed on employees feel comfortable to you and, importantly, what types of salaries you might expect in various positions. In respect to salaries, American students can look at the College Scorecard.[40] (Though it is a bit more confusing to use, students can also look at Schoold.)[41] Use can also use your university's career center to find out this information. They may also help you contact various graduates who work in a particular field so you can interview them. You need to take the initiative. As Macleans indicates "Universities are good at imparting knowledge, but most fail when it comes to teaching students how to get a job".[42]

C . It is equally important to reflect not only on what your personal priorities are but on what strengths you possess. Ideally, you can ask to see various test data the school might have on you (though as noted, schools often refuse to make this data public). Still, you should, with the help of others who know you well, assess what your strengths and

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[40] https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/

[41] https://www.huffingtonpost.com/robyn-shulman-/schoold-the-next-amazon-f_b_11878720.html

[42] http://www.macleans.ca/economy/business/the-missing-link-universities-are-good-at-imparting-knowledge-but-though-they-have-career-counselling-centres-most-fail-when-it-comes-to-teaching-students-how-to-get-a-job/

weaknesses are. It makes little sense, for example, to pursue are career in accounting if you are not that interested in math – whatever the projected salary for accountants is.

Overall, it is important to gain two types of skills at university. Since many change careers a number of times over their lifetimes, it is important to gain general skills that you can use across a variety of positions. (Jeanne Meister in Forbes magazine suggests "The average worker today stays at each of his or her jobs for 4.4 years, according to the most recent available data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, but the expected tenure of the workforce's youngest employees is about half that.")[43] The general skills most cited are critical thinking, problem solving, and effective writing. Unfortunately, as we saw above, while institutions of higher education often stress the importance of these skills, graduating seniors may not be as fully competent in them as they should be. Critical thinking is often defined in different ways by different people. But if you focus on several of Blooms educational learning objectives, you should have a clear sense of what it refers to: (a) comprehension (understanding the key points of a text), (b) application (using knowledge from texts to address a problem than that is not referred to in the original text), (c) analysis (identifying causes, ranking them as to their significance, and finding evidence to support one's claims), (d) synthesis (combining information from texts in a new, innovative way to address a particular problem), and (e) evaluation (assessing and justifying judgements made regarding the above categories).

How do you gain critical thinking given the limitations of many college courses? It is something you can, to a certain extent, take charge of through your own initiative. Bok (2006:144) asserts: "Most studies show that improvement in critical thinking varies directly

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43 http://www.forbes.com/sites/jeannemeister/2012/08/14/job-hopping-is-the-new-normal-for-millennials-three-ways-to-prevent-a-human-resource-nightmare/#66a8a4ea5508

with the time students spend studying, the extent to which they participate actively in class, and the amount of discussion they have on intellectual matters outside of class, both with faculty and with classmates, especially those with views and background different from their own." It is intriguing that Bok also notes (2006:141) that some majors are associated with declines in these skills. Education, for example, "proved to be negatively associated with self-reported growth in analytical and problem-solving skills, critical thinking, . . . and general knowledge." Science was associated with a decline in writing ability. My point is, you need to take charge of gaining these skills yourself – by being an active, questioning, learning – rather than leave it to a set of classes that you passively sit through.

Compared with these general skills, the other set of skills seem more straight forward. Certain technical skills are needed for specific professions. What they are you can readily find out by interviewing employers and employees in the area you wish to work. With these skills, the courses you take often are critical. Many universities excel at given you key technical skills and, if they are not offered in courses, you can often ask a professor for an independent study course to learn them with the professor and/or your own.

One of the most intriguing points made in "The Role of Higher Education in Career Development: Employer Perceptions" is that "Employers place more weight on experience, particularly internships and employment during school vs. academic credentials including GPA and college major when evaluating a recent graduate for employment."[44] It makes sense. There has been tremendous grade inflation in recent years. Employers are not sure what to make a A- grade average, for example. It could be because the student is smart or

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[44] https://www.slideshare.net/MiGlobalTalent/employer-panel-lou-wassel3

because there is considerable grade inflation at the school. Nor, as we saw above, there is little reason to assume a university graduate has the skills needed simply because that student has a degree. As a result, they prefer to rely on how well students do in part-time jobs during college and especially internships in their field. These provide a much clearer sense of how students will perform in specific jobs. If you take on a part-time job, it is better to stay with one through your years at university rather than skip around. Staying put in the same job conveys you possess persistence and consistency and, moreover, are good at your position. Your employer sought to keep you. Here are eight reasons for getting an internship.[45] You will note the information does not come from an elite university but from small, lesser known private college. It emphasizes a point made earlier – you need not go to a high status university to gain key career skills.

> Experience: Students that have internships acquire more well rounded experiences and also get to see first-hand how companies work. . . Company Expectations: Most companies expect college graduates to have some level of experience, even with entry-level positions. An internship provides the all-important "experience" all students' need. . . Resume Builder: . . . [It] provides a great foundation in your desired industry and will propel you above other college graduates with no internship experience. Glimpse Into A Full-Time Job: . . . An internship provides a glimpse into what the work is like and if you will like it or not. Gain Confidence: You may not have the experience yet, or even the confidence to do the job you think you want, however, most internships train college students on-the-job and provide a fantastic learning experience for them to build their

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[45] http://blog.enc.edu/8-reasons-why-every-college-student-needs-an-internship

confidence. Build Your Network: . . . Internships allow students to connect with professionals that are involved in similar work. Reference Letter: As you build your network with the people you are working alongside in your internship, you may be able to ask them to be a professional reference. Get Hired: . . . If you perform well in your internships as a student, the company may end up offering you a full time job when you graduate.

The <u>fourth</u>, and final, strategy threading your way through the problems highlighted in Section 2.1 is to be actively involved in seeking financial aid. Do not simply accept the loan or grant your university offers. Have teachers who know you write to the final aid office or, even better, have them call the office. There pushing to upgrade your support often works better than your requesting (or demanding) it. (I have seen faculty assist students in this way several times at my university.) Financial aid officers may be "hardened" to the complaints of students. But they are often too willing to listen to faculty, administrators, important alumni, or key figures in the community who support you. Also, look at other financial options – other grants that your school may not mention or may not have. If all else feels, there is really no reason you need stay at a particular university that is causing you to go increasingly into debt. More frequently than not, as noted above, there are cheaper alternatives where you can get the same skills and the same (or more) encouragement as you move toward your degree.

Summary: Given the problems highlighted in Section 2.1, this section suggest four basic strategies students might employ for addressing these difficulties. It focuses on (1) planning

ahead for life after graduation as well as (2) being aware that there are scores of schools, while lacking elite status, nonetheless provide the skills students need at considerably lower prices. (3) In preparation for graduation, students should (a) realize that employers are often not that concerned about a student's major; (b) they should seriously explore what various careers options entail well before graduation and (c) gain the general skills and work experiences (especially internships) related to careers they may wish to pursue during their years at university. (4) Finally, students should actively seek out financial aid both from their schools as well as additional sources, not passively be satisfied with their school's initial offer.

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2.3 – Question: Despite the good intentions displayed by the West in spending over two trillion dollars to assist development in Third World countries, the results have been mixed at best and limited at worse. Why has this aid not proved more effective in achieving the desired results?

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In his 2005 *New York Times* best seller *The End of Poverty*, scholar-activist Jeffrey Sachs challenges us to end Third World poverty in "our time." He suggests that the goal is possible given the resources at our command: "The wealth of the rich world, the power of today's vast storehouses of knowledge, and the declining fraction of the world that needs help to escape from poverty all make the end of poverty a realistic possibility by the year 2025." Ending global poverty, Sachs writes, "will require concerted actions by the rich countries as well as the poor. . . . The poor countries must take ending poverty seriously, and will have to devote

a greater share of their national resources to cutting poverty rather than to war, corruption, and political infighting. The rich countries will need to move beyond the platitudes of helping the poor, and follow through on their repeated promises to deliver more help. All this is possible. Indeed, it is much more likely than it seems." He calls for "networks of mutual accountability . . . [to] run alongside the networks of financing."

Sachs notes that the types of interventions he is suggesting, have a proven track record. He names "The Green Revolution in Asia," "The Eradication of Smallpox," "The Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization," "The Campaign against Malaria," "The Control of African River Blindness," "The Eradication of Polio," "The Spread of Family Planning," "Export Processing Zones in East Asia," and "The Mobile Phone Revolution in Bangladesh." In advocating a comprehensive plan that is "scaled up" to address extreme poverty – defined as living on $1 per day per person – he focuses on Africa, where almost half the population lives in extreme poverty and moreover, in contrast to the rest of the world, is getting worse rather than better.

But Sachs thinks the solution is at hand. It just needs to be applied on a broad, regional scale. Poverty will end, he writes, when:

foreign help, in the form of official development assistance (ODA), helps to jump-start the process of capital accumulation, economic growth, and rising household incomes. The foreign aid feeds into three channels. A little bit goes directly to households, mainly for humanitarian emergencies such as food aid in the midst of a drought. Much more goes directly to the budget to finance public investments, and some is also directed to private businesses (for example, farmers) through microfinance programs and other schemes in

which external assistance directly finances private small businesses and farm improvements. If the foreign assistance is substantial enough, the capital stock rises sufficiently to lift households above subsistence. At that point, the poverty trap is broken . . . Growth becomes self-sustaining.

The cost of such an endeavor? Sachs says that financial assistance would gradually increase from $135 billion in 2006 to roughly $195 billion in 2015, or about 0.44 to 0.54 percent of the rich West's GNP (gross national product) and, importantly, less than the 0.7 percent of GNP these countries have already committed themselves to in supporting the United Nations Millennium Development Fund's goals.

It sounds good. A number of reviews praise Sachs's courage and commitment. "Sachs writes as passionately as he speaks," a *BusinessWeek* reviewer observes. "*The End of Poverty* is superb when describing the dire circumstances of the 1 billion people subsisting on less than a dollar a day. It is hard not to share Sachs's anger after reading his firsthand reporting on the miserly Western aid to African villages ravaged by AIDS, malaria, and hunger. At relatively little expense, Sachs insists, the West could provide medicines and fertilizers that could save millions of lives annually."

And yet there is a problem – a problem that no amount of passionate prose can obscure: Many of Sachs's suggestions have been tried before with, at best, limited success.

A *Washington Post* review states:

Sachs pays surprisingly little attention to the history of aid approaches and results. He seems unaware that his . . . plan is strikingly similar to the early ideas that inspired foreign aid in the 1950s and '60s. Just like Sachs, development planners then

identified countries caught in a "poverty trap," did an assessment of how much they would need to make a "big push" out of poverty and into growth, and called upon foreign aid to fill the "financing gap" between countries' own resources and needs. . . . Spending $2.3 trillion (measured in today's dollars) in aid over the past five decades has left the most aid-intensive regions, like Africa, wallowing in continued stagnation; it's fair to say this approach has not been a great success.

Likewise, a *New York Times* review of Sachs states:

Longtime experts in the field who read . . . [Sachs's] book may feel a strong sense of déjà vu. They should. Much of Sachs's argument can be summed up in this passage from Walt W. Rostow's book *The Stages of Economic Growth* written in 1960: "The creation of the preconditions for takeoff was largely a matter of building social overhead capital -- railways, ports and roads -- and of finding an economic setting in which a shift from agriculture and trade to manufacture was profitable." Sachs neglects to mention the extent to which the Rostow model dominated discussions of development in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. But in that era, waste and corruption fattened up United Nations agencies and recipient governments while doing very little for the poor. . . . Sachs's sales pitch has been made in the past, and the results were meager.

Finally, *The New Yorker* review of Sachs's book observes:

Back in the nineteen-fifties and sixties, many economists were confident that newly independent African countries, such as Ghana, Kenya, and Uganda, would be able to escape poverty if only Western donors filled the "financing gap" between what they could afford and the resources they needed to invest

in factories, roads, railways, and other forms of infrastructure. Once these

nations developed modern industrial sectors, the thinking went, the rest of

their economies would be pulled along. In a 1960 book, *The Stages of Economic

Growth*, W. W. Rostow, an economic historian at M.I.T., popularized a version

of this argument, saying that if underdeveloped nations doubled investment

rates, they would soon "take off" into self-sustained growth. During the

Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, in which Rostow served, America's

foreign-aid budget reached an all-time high of 0.6 per cent of G.D.P. [Gross

Domestic Product], and during the seventies and eighties significant amounts

of aid continued to flow to poor countries. . . . [But] as William Easterly, an

economist formerly with the World Bank, has observed, many countries that

received a significant amount of aid, such as Ghana, Zambia, Chad, and

Zimbabwe, had economies that either failed to grow much or actually shrank.

Meanwhile, a number of places that received very little foreign assistance,

such as Singapore, Hong Kong, and Malaysia, expanded rapidly. Looking at the

overall record, there appears to be no statistical correlation between aid and

growth.

Clearly there is a need for assistance in developing countries. Sachs's book makes that

clear. But how can we address the problem effectively?

In *The White Man's Burden* (2005), Easterly suggests that, for aid to successfully achieve

what it is being spent on, the donors need pay attention to two factors: (1) accountability –

independent evaluations of whether the aid is actually accomplishing what it is supposed to

be accomplishing, and (2) feedback – whether the people receiving the aid are getting what they need and want. He stresses the importance of paying attention to local contexts in allocating aid.

Easterly draws a distinction between "planners" and "searchers." Planners such as Sachs, he suggests, emphasize the big plan; searchers focus on specific plans adapted to local conditions. Planners work from the top down; searchers from the bottom up. Planners focus on pleasing the clients who fund aid projects; searchers consider whether the aid helps those it is supposed to help.

Easterly discusses the contexts in which granting agencies work. "As the awful examples in this [book] . . . illustrate, the official aid agencies simply don't know how to change bad governments into good governments with the apparatus of foreign aid. . . . To make matters worse, the aid agencies need the poor-country government, even a bad government, to fill the role of aid recipient to keep money flowing. . . . Since aid agencies need to please the electorate in rich countries, the agencies often strive to produce side effects for rich countries at the same time they are transforming the rest. . . . The United States requires recipients to spend the aid receipts on products from American companies for about three quarters of its aid. Other donor nations have similar restrictions." Significantly, the subtitle of Easterly's book is, *Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good*.

Summary: Since the 1950s the West has repeatedly committed itself to assisting Third World development. Using the example of Jeffrey Sachs (especially his 2005 book *The End to Poverty*), the case study notes the dedication and commitment that many have brought to addressing Third World development. But things haven't turned out as hoped. One difficulty

with such efforts is they tend to look forward to the future rather than take account of what went wrong in the past. Sachs's call to end poverty is part of a long line of efforts at addressing Third World poverty. He tends to skim over earlier failures while emphasizing future possibilities. Using William Easterly's 2006 book *The White Man's Burden* as a foil to Sachs, I consider what tends to go wrong in Third World aid programs. Easterly emphasizes the importance of understanding how specific projects operate on the ground. Funding agencies need greater feedback regarding what does and does not work. There also needs to be greater accountability regarding outcomes produced.

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2.4 – Question: How might cultural anthropology's core methodological tools help address the problems surrounding foreign aid?

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Anthropologists can approach the problems surrounding foreign aid in two distinct ways. The first is having reporters on the ground who can provide funders with needed feedback regarding what is, and is not, working. Easterly emphasizes the importance of being searchers (in his terminology): "for aid agency staff . . . to listen to the poor [rather] than costing out a Big Plan." He stresses the importance of paying attention "to the searchers with knowledge of local conditions . . . and [getting] feedback from the poor. . . [regarding] all the variable and complicated answers to how to make aid work." Easterly suggests that academics – anthropologists, for example, "could do public service by applying their techniques to evaluate the projects, programs, and approaches taken by aid agencies." Anthropologists

could conduct fieldwork at aid sites and using insights gained from how aid projects are implemented in various settings, explain what actually works in which contexts and why.

The second way anthropologists might approach the problem is through comparison. Paul Collier offers an excellent example.

Collier begins *The Bottom Billion* by observing that we often use outmoded models in speaking about Third World development. Forty years ago, he writes, the problem involved one billion relatively rich people arrayed against five billion relatively poor people. Today, there is a middle four billion with rising growth and per capita incomes.

The problem, Collier asserts, is with the remaining billion people – the "bottom billion" – who are falling behind and, not infrequently, falling apart. Seventy percent of the bottom billion live in Africa (most of the rest in central Asia). Rather than belonging to the twenty-first century, their reality "is the fourteenth century: civil war, plague, ignorance." And yet Collier views their problems as fixable. "Change is going to have to come from within the societies of the bottom billion, but our own policies could make these efforts more likely to succeed, and so more likely to be undertaken."

To ferret out the factors inhibiting development among the bottom billion, Collier compares what has gone amiss in various countries. He highlights four traps that these countries frequently fall into to varying degrees.

(1) Having violent conflicts, usually in the form of civil wars but also in the form of coups. Collier calculates that the typical civil war costs a country roughly $64 billion. Given that two civil wars tend to start within the bottom-billion countries each year, he calculates the cost at over $100 billion per year for these conflicts.

(2) Natural resource traps: the ability to export valuable natural resources (such as oil or diamonds). The royalties that accrue from these exports allow political leaders to ignore the demands of their countrymen. The leaders are freed from electoral accountability; they can establish systems of patronage that reinforce their power. Rather than spending the profits to develop their countries, they store this wealth in Swiss bank accounts.

(3) Not having direct access to the sea and, as a result, not being able to ship goods overseas easily. In contrast to Switzerland, for example, which uses the infrastructure of Germany, Italy, and France to ship its goods overseas, Uganda must depend on a country with a less developed infrastructure, Kenya.

(4) Poor, corrupt governance that prevents development from being successful. Collier notes that "the leaders of many of the poorest countries are themselves among the global super rich. They like things the way they are." He writes that unfortunately "many of the politicians and senior public officials in the countries of the bottom billion are villains."

In respect to the bottom billion, Collier observes: "Seventy-three percent . . . have been through civil war, 29 percent . . . are dominated by the politics of natural resource revenues, 30 percent are landlocked, resource-scarce, and in bad neighborhoods [i.e., with poor neighbors], and 76 percent have been through a prolonged period of bad governance and poor economic policies."

Collier has an eye for the telling example. Laurent Kabila, who overthrew the corrupt government of Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire in 1997, famously told a journalist that all you needed to overthrow an African government was "ten thousand dollars and a satellite phone." While a bit of an exaggeration, Kabila's point was that, given the poverty of Zaire,

one could hire a mercenary army at relatively little cost. And the satellite phone? That was to establish contracts with key Western extractors of Zaire's mineral resources. (America Mineral Fields signed a $1 billion agreement with Kabila to export zinc, cobalt, and diamonds.)

Collier notes that foreign aid, even in its present form, has proved helpful to the bottom billion. He suggests it has added perhaps one percentage point to the yearly growth rate of these countries. "Without aid, cumulatively the countries of the bottom billion would have become much poorer . . . Aid has been a holding operation preventing things from falling apart."

Having used a comparative perspective to analyze the problems the bottom billion face, Collier offers three suggestions for increasing the effectiveness of foreign aid in addressing these problems.

First, he suggests limited, focused military interventions to restore order as well as prevent coups. Given the cost of civil wars, he argues, focused Western interventions – such as the British carried out in Sierra Leone in 2000 with only a few hundred soldiers – can stop destructive civil wars from tearing a country apart. Effective military intervention at the onset of the Rwandan genocide probably would have significantly reduced the number murdered. The threat of Western intervention against illegal coups provides protection and stability to political leaders seeking to carry out development. They do not have to constantly worry about being overthrown.

Second, Collier suggests the establishment of ethical, transparent codes of conduct for both the Western companies dealing with the bottom billion and for the countries

themselves. He indicates that such codes, if they had teeth, could prove effective. Western

companies could be sued in court for violating them and the countries refused aid when they

failed to abide by them. "Resource revenues to the bottom billion are bigger than aid, and far

more poorly used," Collier notes. "If we could raise the effectiveness of [how these] resource

revenues [are spent] . . . the impact would be enormous."

Finally, Western nations should revise their trading policies. A few decades ago, the

bottom billion might have competed with Asian countries in respect to cheap labor. But now

that China and India dominate the cheap labor market, people in the bottom billion are

unable to compete. To solve the problem, Collier suggests giving the poorest countries a

trading edge: "Goods and services exported from the bottom billion to the rich world markets

. . . [would] pay lower tariffs than the same goods coming from Asia. . . . Privileging the

bottom billion against low-income Asia is not just or fair; a more accurate word might be

'expedient.'"

The *New York Times* review of *The Bottom Billion* suggests that "Collier's is a better book

than either Sachs's or Easterly's for two reasons. First, its analysis of the causes of poverty is

more convincing. Second, its remedies are more plausible."

We might use a comparative perspective to also examine foreign aid as a structural

system. Quoting from a recent review in the *Times Literary Supplement*: "Because aid is

politically accountable to Western electorates – which consume only the images and reports

of its impact and not the real things – there are few incentives to make it work better." If

foreign aid really worked, many of the institutions supporting it would no longer be needed.

To stay in business, aid agencies have an investment in aid working partially – seeming to

address important problems without ever completely solving them. This is how Muhammad Yunus, the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize winner, phrased it in his *Creating a World Without Poverty*: "Many antipoverty efforts are funded by well-intentioned people in the developed countries, either through NGOs, government grants, or international aid agencies. It's sad to see much of this money being invested in ways that are wasteful. In many cases money that is supposed to help the poor ends up creating business for companies and organizations in the developed world – training firms, suppliers of equipment and materials, consultants, advisers, and the like."

Alex de Waals's *Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa* (1997) phrases the problem in stronger terms. "Most humanitarian aid to Africa, while useful in keeping aid agencies afloat, is, for the victims of war and famine, either useless or counterproductive. Not only has aid repeatedly fueled violence, it has also distracted attention from the human rights violations that often underpin famines and, by taking on a welfare role, served to remove the responsibility for preventing famine from governments."

Summarizing, we have drawn on key writings by prominent authorities to explore why foreign aid to Third World countries has been significantly less successful than hoped. Participant-observation and appreciation of the contexts in which aid projects are implemented could prove key to developing more effective systems of accountability. Rather than judging aid organization on whether or not they spend large amounts of money, they could be judged on their successes – what works under which conditions and why – assessed by independent reports from the people receiving the aid as well as the fieldworkers working

with them. Using Paul Collier's *Bottom Billion*, we saw how comparison leads to illuminating insights, insights that help address the problem in effective ways.

We have seen the potential for anthropologists to challenge the status quo by facilitating transparency, and through transparency, accountability. They can make clear to wide audiences beyond the academy what is going on where; what is and is not working and why. They can explain, for example, why foreign aid works well for aid organizations but not necessarily as well for the people these organizations help.

We have also perceived the power of academics to reach the broader public. I noted earlier that many anthropologists have not effectively reached out in this way. But Sachs, Easterly, and Collier all have academic appointments. They show what is possible.

In the next two sections we discuss how participant-observation and understanding the contexts in which one operates could have provided critical information that might have led to less loss of life and money during the Vietnam War. Rather than focusing on its own military might, the United States might have focused on understanding those opposing them – why they were fighting, how they were fighting, and why they were being successful.

We also return to the question of getting those in power to listen. Facilitating cultural understanding and transparency is one thing. Making sure what is being disclosed is disseminated widely – not just to power brokers but to the broader public – is another. The key is presenting your information in ways the broader public appreciates and understands. If Collier, Sachs, Easterly, and the authors discussed in the next two sections could do this, so could anthropologists.

Summary: Obviously, anthropologists don't have magic wands they can wave to solve the problems of Third World development. But they can use participant-observation, contextual and comparison to not only induce greater accountability by funding institutions but also help reframe aid projects so they achieve greater success. Given that anthropologists conduct fieldwork in a range of Third World settings, they are well placed to assess what does and does not work on the ground in respect to aid projects. Using their skills in participant-observation and contextual understanding, anthropologists can facilitate transparency, so others know what is happening where. Placing problems within comparative contexts lets interested individuals see the forest through the trees – see the big picture rather than be fixated on a myriad of details from diverse locales. Paul Collier's _The Bottom Billion_ (2007) illustrates this approach. He offers four insights regarding what has gone wrong with Third World development (relating to violent conflicts, natural resource traps, being landlocked, and corrupt governance) and presents three suggestions for setting things right (relating to military interventions, codes of conduct, and trading policies). In addition, the section questions the way accountability is presently framed. Accountability is evaluated in terms of the donor government's interests, not the needs of the people being helped. Aid agencies often emphasize the appearance of doing good – spending the money these governments allocate – rather than achieving positive results. It keeps the agencies in business while allowing governments, without substantial proof, to assert they are addressing the problem.

2.5 – <u>Question</u>: *The United States military won every set battle it fought against the opposing Vietnamese forces and repeatedly overwhelmed these forces with its technology and firepower. Yet it failed to win the war. What went wrong?*

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The Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the Mall in Washington, D.C. is one of the world's great memorials. When you visit, you frequently see people – perhaps a woman holding a child or an elderly couple – lovingly running their hands over one of the 58,256 names inscribed on the wall. A number of the three million people who visit the memorial each year leave sentimental items for loved ones inscribed there. As you look at the names of the dead your see your own reflection, creating a space that brings the past and the present together. I know of no other memorial that generates such emotion or draws people to interact with it with such love and respect.

With insight gained from the passage of time – it is now more than thirty years since the Vietnam War ended – we might feel confused as to the great national purpose the United States was defending. Here is the problem.

Today, Vietnam is a thriving exemplar of capitalism. Wasn't the war about stopping the spread of communism? Wasn't the war about drawing Vietnam into the capitalist orbit? *The Economist* describes what occurred after communist North Vietnam won the war in 1975 and took control of the country:

In the 1980s Ho Chi Minh's successors . . . damaged the war-ravaged economy . . . by attempting to introduce real communism, collectivizing land ownership, and

repressing private business. This caused the country to slide to the brink of famine. The collapse soon afterwards of its cold-war sponsor, the Soviet Union, added to the country's deep isolation and cut off the flow of rubles that had kept its economy going. Neighboring countries were inundated with desperate Vietnamese "boat people."

Since then the country has been transformed by almost two decades of rapid but equitable growth, in which Vietnam has flung open its doors to the outside world and liberalized its economy. Over the past decade annual growth has averaged 7.5 percent. . . . An agricultural miracle has turned a country of 85m once barely able to feed itself into one of the world's main providers of farm produce. Vietnam has also become a big exporter of clothes, shoes, and furniture, soon to be joined by microchips when Intel opens its $1 billion factory outside Ho Chi Minh City. Imports of machinery are soaring. Exports plus imports equal 160 percent of GDP, making the economy one of the world's most open. . . .

Vietnam's Communists conceded economic defeat 22 years ago, in the depths of a crisis, and brought in market-based reforms called *doi moi* (renewal), similar to those Deng Xiaoping had introduced in China a few years earlier. As in China, it took time for the effects to show up, but over the past few years economic liberalization has been fostering rapid, poverty-reducing growth. The World Bank's representative in Vietnam, Ajay Chhibber, calls Vietnam a "poster child" of the benefits of market-oriented reforms. Not only does it comply with the catechism of the "Washington Consensus" — free enterprise, free trade, sensible state finances, and so on — but it

also ticks all the boxes for the Millennium Development Goals, the UN's anti-poverty

blueprint. . . . Vietnam has become the darling of foreign investors and multinationals.

It makes one wonder what would have happened if the United States had NOT

intervened. In addition to the 58,256 American lives lost, probably more than two million

Vietnamese died in the conflict. If this is where Vietnam ended up thirty years after the war –

a pillar of Western capitalism and a significant American trading partner created with little

American investment – should the United States have spent over half a trillion dollars (in

2007 terms) assisting the South Vietnamese during the Vietnam War?

Forty-five years ago, that was not the way the United States government perceived the

situation in South Vietnam. It viewed it, instead, in terms of falling dominoes. To quote

Stanley Karnow's *Vietnam: A History*, the companion book to the 1983 PBS series on the war:

"Presidents from Harry S. Truman through Richard M. Nixon had justified America's

commitment to [South] Vietnam as part of its policy to 'contain' global Communism. They

advanced the 'domino theory,' submitting that defeat in Southeast Asia would topple the

other nations of the region – and even, as Lyndon Johnson warned, menace 'the beaches of

Waikiki.'" The perception was that instead of appeasing communism, the United States

needed to draw a line in the sand.

The American struggle with communism was actually more subtle and complicated than

falling dominoes. To quote Neil Sheehan's Pulitzer Prize-winning *A Bright Shining Lie*, the

secretaries of state under U.S. Presidents Truman and Eisenhower

"were not naive enough to think they could export democracy to every nation on

earth. . . . If American statesman saw a choice . . . they favored a democratic state or a

reformist-minded dictatorship. Their high strategy was to organize the entire non-Communist world into a network of countries allied with or dependent on the United States. They wanted a tranquil array of nations protected by American military power, recognizing American leadership in international affairs, and integrated into an economic order where the dollar was the main currency of exchange and American business was preeminent. The United States didn't seek colonies as such . . . Americans were convinced that their imperial system did not victimize foreign peoples. 'Enlightened self-interest' was the sole national egotism to which Americans would admit."

The tragedy is that key American statesmen and the American public failed to grasp important dynamics of Vietnamese society. Here is how the anthropologist Neil Jamieson phrases it in *Understanding Vietnam*:

> Over two and a half million Americans went to Vietnam, and over 55,000 thousand . . . died there. . . . Yet our understanding of this tragic episode remains . . . I believe, in many respects simply wrong. We have failed to understand our experience [in Vietnam] because, then and now, we have ignored the perspectives of the people most deeply concerned with the war in which we became involved: The Vietnamese. . . . The images of Vietnam about which the controversy swirled in the United States arose from our own culture not from Vietnamese realities or perceptions.

In his acclaimed 1972 book *The Best and the Brightest*, David Halberstam asks how so many intellectually astute individuals in the upper levels of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations could have gotten things so wrong. The short answer, he suggested, was that

they were arrogant: "An administration which flaunted its intellectual superiority and superior academic credentials made the most critical of decisions with virtually no input from anyone who had any expertise on the recent history of that part of the world, and it in no way factored in the entire experience of the French Indochina War."

Sheehan describes John Paul Vann, a decorated military/civilian war hero, this way: Vann "knew nothing of the Vietnamese and their culture and history. He did not consider this ignorance any more of an impediment to effective action than his lack of knowledge of counter-guerrilla warfare. . . Vann was sure that he would be able to see what motivated the Vietnamese officers with whom he would be working and persuade them to do what was in their best interest and in the interest of the United States."

As David Halberstam writes in *The Making of a Quagmire*, it was "a classic example of seeing the world the way we wanted to, instead of the way it was." The tragedy is that so many – Americans and Vietnamese – lost their lives as a result.

What should the United States government have known about Vietnam? It should have been aware of three anthropological points that today may seem fairly obvious.

First, global political movements such as communism aren't monolithic organizations with everyone marching to (or even hearing) the same drummer. A split between the two most powerful communist countries – China and the Soviet Union – was apparent in the 1960s. The Soviet Union, for example, refused to support China in the 1962 Sino-Indian war. In 1967 Red Guards besieged the Soviet Embassy in Beijing. In 1969 armed clashes broke out on the Sino-Soviet border.

Rather than the Vietnamese working hand in glove with the Chinese, they had actually been at odds with them for over two thousand years. From 111 B.C. to 939 A.D., northern Vietnam was forced to be part of the Chinese empire. Revolts against Chinese domination erupted regularly. Perhaps most notable was the revolt led by Trung Trac and Trung Nhi in 40 A.D. The Trung sisters became folklore heroines for their revolt, remembered still today in stories and songs. No reading of Vietnamese history could miss the tensions between it and its giant neighbor to the north.

Unfortunately, for much of the Vietnam War the American government viewed communists in these various countries as speaking with a shared voice, when in actuality they were speaking in divergent voices. It was only in the 1970s, when President Richard Nixon was trying to find an honorable exit from the war, that he began playing China off against the Soviet Union.

Second, the United States government failed to realize that the leader of North Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh, was less concerned with embracing communism than with throwing off colonial domination and uniting the country. Ho perceived himself as fighting a war of independence – something the United States, in another time or place, might have supported. Ho certainly tried to draw the United States into supporting his cause. In 1945, when he proclaimed Vietnam's independence from France, he quoted an excerpt from the American Declaration of Independence. Stanley Karnow writes, Ho Chi Minh in the 1940s and 1950s tried to "persuade the United States to underwrite his cause. . . . The United States might have plausibly encouraged Ho to emulate Marshal Tito, the Yugoslav Communist leader who was soon to defy Moscow."

Halberstam in *The Making of a Quagmire* writes: "In Indochina, a colonial war turned the nationalism of a proud people against the West and into the hands of a very real enemy. That was the beginning of the downward cycle, for in those years when the Western nations were powerful they might have channeled this nationalism into a relatively neutral force."

Initially, American opposition to Ho Chi Minh had little to do with Vietnam. In seeking to strengthen France in Europe, the U.S. ended up supporting French colonial efforts in Indochina. The United States got drawn into supporting a weak ally in a colonial adventure that, based on its own history, it might have normally opposed. It is ironic that at the very time the United States was supporting French imperialism, it was urging the dismantling of the British Empire.

Third, the United States failed to grasp North Vietnam's strategy for fighting the war. The U.S. military assumed it could carry out a conventional war of attrition against North Vietnam. Karnow writes: "Official U.S. communiqués and press reports . . . conveyed the idea that U.S. air strikes were devastating North Vietnam. . . On my initial trip to the region, I expected to see it in ruins. Yet Hanoi, Haiphong, and the nearby countryside were almost totally unscathed. I remembered General Curtis LeMay's thunderous cry to 'Bomb them back into the Stone Age' – but, scanning the north, I concluded that it had been in the Stone Age for decades."

What the United States failed to grasp was the dedication the North Vietnamese brought to their cause. They played the same game of attrition as the United States. But they were able to play it longer and harder. Quoting Karnow again:

"American strategists went astray by ascribing their own values to the communists. [General William] Westmoreland, for one, was sure that he knew the threshold of their endurance. . . . Even after the war, he still seemed to have misunderstood the dimensions of their determination. "Any American commander who took the same vast losses as General Giap," he said, "would have been sacked overnight."

"But Giap, the brilliant North Vietnamese general, was not an American confronted by a strange people in a faraway land. His troops and their civilian supporters, fighting on their own soil, were convinced that their protracted struggle would ultimately wear away the patience of their foes.

"We were not strong enough to drive a half million American troops out of Vietnam, but that wasn't our aim," Giap explained to me. "We sought to break the will of the American government to continue the conflict. Westmoreland was wrong to count on his superior firepower to grind us down. Our Soviet and Chinese comrades also failed to grasp our approach when they asked how many divisions we had in relation to the Americans, how we would cope with their technology, their artillery, their air attacks. We were waging a people's war [in the Vietnamese manner] . . . a total war in which every man, every woman, every unit, big or small, is sustained by a mobilized population. So America's sophisticated weapons, electronic devices, and the rest were to no avail. Despite its military power, America misgauged the limits of its power. In war there are two factors – human beings and weapons. Ultimately, though, human beings are the decisive factor."

"Ironically, many U.S. officers concurred. "The American army and its South Vietnamese allies," wrote General Bruce Palmer after the war, "demonstrated a tendency to rely on superior firepower and technology rather than on professional skill and soldierly qualities. . . . [The Viet Cong] had an extraordinary ability to recuperate," noted Palmer, "absorbing casualties in numbers unthinkable to us, replacing people, retraining and reindoctrinateing them, and then bouncing back."

The American military won every battle it fought against the Communists, often inflicting tremendous losses. (In the 1968 Tet offensive, half of the Viet Cong's army was destroyed.) But as a Vietnamese colonel commented after the war, when these facts were pointed out to him, "That may be so, but it is also irrelevant." The North Vietnamese could replace their losses just as fast as the Americans could cause them.

What is not irrelevant – for the point I am making – is how particular Americans coped with this misunderstanding. They often deceived – or, if you prefer, lied to – themselves and others that they were winning the war. Writing about how Robert McNamara, the American secretary of defense, often seemed to have supporting statistics to emphasize that an American victory would soon be at hand, David Halberstam, in *The Best and the Brightest*, states: "McNamara had invented . . . [statistics], he dissembled even with the bureaucracy . . . It was part of his sense of service . . . it was all right to lie and dissemble for the right cause. It was part of service, loyalty to the President."

So did the United States government learn from its mistakes in Vietnam?

One of the painful themes of the post-invasion literature on Iraq – especially the Coalition Provisional Authority (C.P.A.) run in 2003-2004 by Paul "Jerry" Bremer – is that, exactly as in

Vietnam, the United States remained comparatively clueless as to the cultural and political contexts it was operating in.

Rajiv Chandrasekaran, in *Imperial Life in the Emerald City* presents an account of how the United States administered Iraq during the year after the invasion. A reviewer of Chandrasekaran's book writes: "The C.P.A.'s recruitment policy would have shamed Tammany Hall. Loyalty to George W. Bush and the Republican Party was apparently the prime criterion for getting work in the C.P.A." For example, a man named John Agresto was recruited to rehabilitate Iraq's university system (with 22 campuses and more than 375,000 students). "Agresto had no background in post-conflict reconstruction and no experience in the Middle East," Chandrasekaran writes. "But Agresto was connected: . . . Vice President Dick Cheney's wife had worked with him at the National Endowment for the Humanities." James K. Haveman, a former community-health director for a Michigan Republican governor, attempted to revitalize the Iraq health system – through a U.S.-inspired model involving private providers and copayments. All the while, Iraqi hospitals lacked essential medical equipment and were overwhelmed by the need to care for the wounded. A twenty-four-year old, Jay Hallen, with little knowledge of American stock markets and few if any courses in economics or finance, was put in charge of reopening the Baghdad stock market. He set up a stock market modeled after the New York Stock Exchange; but it didn't work as planned. When Chandrasekaran asked the Iraqi who took over the stock market after Hallen what would have happened if Hallen had not been assigned to the task, he replied: "We would have opened months earlier. [Hallen] had grand ideas but those ideas did not materialize." As

a member of the Coalition Provisional Authority confided to Chandrasekaran: "If this place succeeds, . . . it will be in spite of what we did, not because of it."

Summary: The Vietnam War (1959-1975) was a deeply traumatic event for both the United States and Vietnam. More than 58,000 Americans and possibly two million Vietnamese died in the war. It divided the United States more than any war since the Civil War. The United States clearly lost the Vietnam War. But today, three decades later, Vietnam is a capitalistically oriented country and an increasingly important trading partner for America. Given this turn of events, one might wonder, in hindsight, whether it was worth fighting the war. Despite its overwhelming military superiority, the U.S. lost the war because it failed to understand its Vietnamese opponents. It employed a military strategy that played to the opponents' strengths and to its own weaknesses. The United States military emphasized a "search and destroy" war of attrition. What the military did not appreciate was that the Vietnamese could continually replace their losses and remain militarily effective. The United States ultimately could not. Framing the problem in comparative terms, we see that the United States displayed some of the same cultural unawareness in Iraq in 2003-2004.

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2.6 – Question: How might anthropologists have helped the United States military avoid losing thousands of lives and billions of dollars in pursuit of a failed cause?

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One of the striking points of the Vietnam War is how few academics actually studied Vietnam during this period. Fox Butterfield, in a review article for the *New York Times Magazine* notes that a "black hole" existed in the American academy with respect to Vietnam

during the war. The *New York Times* conducted a survey in 1970 and found not a single scholar focusing on North Vietnam; fewer than thirty students were studying Vietnamese.

One might argue that key political decision makers were not inclined to trust academic treatises during this period. But even if they had wanted to, there was little to guide them. In *The Best and the Brightest*, Halberstam noted that key government experts on Asia had been pushed out of government service during the anti-Communist campaigns of the 1950s and were never replaced. As a result, few in key administrative positions understood Vietnam or the Vietnamese.

Not having an on-the-ground understanding of what was working and what wasn't meant that United States spent billions of dollars trying to assist development in South Vietnam and, by and large, being ineffective. Here is an example from Stanley Karnow's *Vietnam*:

As long as the United States was willing to foot the bill for any given program, the Vietnamese rarely rejected it.

The difficulty, however, was to measure results. Or, as a U.S. official in Saigon explained it to me . . . "Say, for instance, that we hand them a plan to distribute ten thousand radios to villages so that peasants can listen to Saigon propaganda broadcasts. They respond enthusiastically, and we deliver the radios. A few months later, when we inquire, they tell us what we want to hear: peasants are being converted to the government cause, and we're winning the war. But what had really happened? Have all the radios reached the villages, or have half of them been sold on the black market? Are peasants listening to Saigon or to Hanoi? We don't know. . . . We report progress to Washington because Washington demands progress.

No transparency, no accountability. Just money spent to an uncertain end with uncertain results.

Not having on-the-ground information meant that more than money was lost; so were thousands of lives. In the spring of 1965, General William Westmoreland was eager to gain combat troops in order to conduct extensive "search and destroy" missions against the Viet Cong. As a precaution, Westmoreland and the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) decided to do a study of the enemy's capacity to replace its losses (the point General Giap discussed above). David Halberstam writes:

When Colonel William Crossen, one of the top intelligence officers, put . . . [the report] together he was appalled: the number of men that Hanoi could send down the trails [into South Vietnam] without seriously damaging its defense at home was quite astonishing. . . . When Crossen came up with his final figure he could not believe it, so he checked it again, being even more conservative . . . and still he was staggered by what he found; the other side had an amazing capacity and capability of reinforcing. When he brought the study to Westmoreland's staff and showed the figure to a general there . . . "Jesus" said the general, "if we tell this to the people in Washington we'll be out of the war tomorrow. We'll have to revise [the figures] downward." So Crossen's figures were duly scaled down considerably . . . the staff intuitively protecting the commander from things he didn't want to see and didn't want to hear, never coming up with information which might challenge what a commander wanted to do at a given moment.

The information the colonel collected wasn't top-secret intelligence. To collect it, you could simply examine Vietnamese birth records gathered by the colonial French administration from the 1930s and 1940s.

One might criticize Colonel Crossen for not reporting his figures to the United States Congress when the surge in troop strength was being debated. He was a soldier following orders and could conceivably have been court-marshaled for such an act. But a few tenured anthropologists could easily have checked Vietnamese birthrates in French colonial archives and, without any threat of being fired, made their data widely available to the U.S. Congress and to the world media. They could have made clear to all that Westmoreland's strategy was likely to not only fail but, in allowing the war to escalate as it did, cause untold misery and destruction.

Using comparison, we can explore why the United States military proved ineffective in Vietnam and, to a lesser degree, in Iraq in 2003-2004. John Nagl, in *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* examines why the British army succeeded in fighting a communist insurgency in Malaysia, while the United States army failed in Vietnam. He observes, in explaining the difference, "the British army was a learning institution and the American army was not." He writes, "despite the efforts of a large number of officers on the ground who knew that the army's conventional approach was ineffective – and was in fact counterproductive in many ways – the U.S. Army continued to rely on a conventional approach to defeating the insurgents through an attrition-based search-and-destroy strategy." He suggests, "local forces have inherent advantages over outsiders in a counterinsurgency campaign. They can gain intelligence through the public support that naturally adheres to a nation's own armed

forces. They don't need to allocate translators to combat patrols. They understand . . . tribal loyalties and family relationships. . . . It is perhaps only a slight exaggeration to suggest that, on their own, foreign forces can't defeat an insurgency; the best they can hope for is to create the conditions that will enable local forces to win it for them." The United States didn't use this strategy. The British did. The American military preferred to play to its military and technological strengths. The British, having less of a technological edge and a smaller force, were more adaptable.

One of the hot topics being debated in anthropology today is whether anthropologists should participate in what are termed Human Terrain Systems, projects that embed social scientists in military units to assist them in understanding the cultural contexts within which U.S. military units are operating.

Clearly the American government needs anthropological help. A look at the recently published *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (2007) makes that clear. If readers were ever in doubt as to the importance of anthropological understanding in military operations, they need only read the book's chapter on intelligence: "What makes intelligence analysis for [counterinsurgency] so distinct and so challenging is the amount of sociocultural information that must be gathered and understood. . . . Truly grasping the operational environment requires commanders and staffs to devote at least as much effort to understanding the people they support as they do to understanding the enemy. All this information is essential to get at the root causes of the insurgency and to determine the best ways to combat it."

But no matter how honest an anthropologist is, no matter who runs the program, no matter how little harm an anthropologist seeks to do to his informants, if the information is

presented to a governmental bureaucrat and stays within the governmental bureaucracy – without making the information widely available to the public – it is at best dangerous and at worst destructive. Anthropologists shouldn't be "private contractors," hired out as researchers and educators to people who will use their knowledge to their own ends, for good or ill. As we saw with Colonel Crossen, it becomes a dangerous tango. Readers might note that The *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* stresses a "unity of command" structure – "exercised by a single leader through a formal command . . . system." There is no guarantee that the information the public needs to hear, rather than the information the decision makers want it to hear, will get through to the public.

Like investigative journalists, anthropologists can bring to light the dysfunctional dynamics of key organizations. This is what Rajiv Chandrasekaran did in his book on the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq run by Jerry Bremer. Anthropologists could write in an active, vivid way – as Chandrasekaran did – so others will read their accounts. Anthropologists need to make their studies public so a wide audience outside the governmental agencies affected can assess and discuss them. By letting others know what is happening in out-of-the-way places, beyond the ken of the general public and politicians, anthropologists can facilitate transparency and, through that transparency, a degree of accountability to government policy.

But anthropologists can also do more. They have skills many investigative journalists lack. They stay longer in a place. They study it in detail, becoming sensitive to cultural nuances and ambiguities. They can place specifics within broader contexts, making sense of the whole in ways that illuminate the broader dynamics at work.

Speaking truth to power is an important role that anthropologists can fulfill. In presenting their observations and analyses to a wide public audience at critical historical moments, anthropologists can be the difference that makes a difference. It is a role the broader public can not only appreciate but honor. It can save thousands of lives and billions of dollars.

What I am suggesting isn't new. It draws on a debate in the 1920s between the journalist Walter Lippmann and the philosopher-educator John Dewey regarding whether or not the general public should defer to the authority of experts or whether the public should be actively involved in advancing the common good. In 1922, Walter Lippmann suggested that given the complexity of the problems that afflicted America, the general public was incapable of coming to reasoned, effective solutions. Lippmann preferred, instead, a class of special experts – a group of professionals – who could sort through and order the mass of data relevant to a problem. They would present their analyses to decision makers who would then act on these professionals' advice.

Dewey questioned Lippmann's dependence on experts to order knowledge for others. For Dewey, professional social scientists should educate the broader public – not just the decision makers – about social issues. Rather than deferring to experts and expert opinion, the public should be actively engaged in deciding public issues. Building democratic communities, Dewey asserted, entailed the active involvement of citizens. "The union of social science, access to facts, and the art of literary presentation," Dewey wrote, "is not an easy thing to achieve. But its attainment seems to me the only genuine solution of the problem of an intelligent direction of social life."

Under Lippmann's scenario, professionals become bureaucrats of the system – similar to Russian apparatchiks. Cultural anthropologists should not be mere technicians, hired guns, or patrons of the powerful. They should be independent voices that challenge accepted "wisdom". Their responsibility is to those who make their roles as intellectuals, as academics, possible – the broader democratic society. Their role is to speak truth to power.

Summarizing, we have examined how participant-observation and, more pointedly, an understanding of the contexts in which the war was being fought could have made a major difference in the Vietnam War, saving thousands of lives and millions of dollars. Understanding others – especially those opposing you – is not simply a nice idea. It is critical to dealing effectively with people different from you. You should not assume others operate in the same manner with the same perspectives as you do.

In comparing the American approach in Vietnam with that of the British in Malaysia, we saw that technological superiority can be a weakness. It can prevent seeing one's failures and quickly correcting them.

We also emphasized the role anthropologists can play in speaking truth to power -- challenging the position of those in power with new data, new facts. It, too, can be a position of power if listened to. No anthropologists every challenged Westmoreland's search-and-destroy strategy with concrete cultural facts and statistics in a public venue so we will never know if it would have made a difference. Still, if key newspapers publicized such information it might have. What we do know is that anthropologists cannot speak truth to power if we are embedded in the very organizations they are challenging. If they are going to hold the

military accountable, they need to have an independent position and speak in ways that many hear, not just a few select power brokers.

The next two sections move in a different direction. Where we have been talking about international problems distant from the immediate concerns of many students, we now turn to something of direct concern to them – their own education. Why does it cost so much? What do they gain from it? Students are encouraged to become change agents. By understanding the contexts within which higher education operates in both Canada and the United States, students are able to gain the insights needed to navigate educational bureaucracies in both countries. Again, we see cultural anthropology's toolkit as a potential game changer. Instead of competing for admission to certain elite schools, students can reframe the admissions process and make colleges compete for students on their cost and educational effectiveness. They need not collectively organized to reframe the process. It is something they can do, on their own, with certain information in hand.

Summary: The United States was often fishing in the dark, trying to assist Vietnamese development and, more critically, struggling to understand why it couldn't win the war despite its tremendous military advantage and the infliction of enormous losses on the enemy. If key cultural information had been pushed to the fore regarding the opposing Vietnamese forces, there was a moment of opportunity when things could have turned out differently in Vietnam. Because few academics were studying Vietnam during the Vietnam War and fewer researching what was happening on the ground (versus what the military claimed was happening), the American public and policy planners lacked important information at a critical moment in the war. The "search and destroy" strategy that led to the

buildup of American troops and a steep rise in American casualties was based on the belief that the opposing Vietnamese couldn't indefinitely absorb punishing losses without declining in military effectiveness. What was ignored was the Vietnamese not only had the ability to absorb enormous losses but could renew and rebuild their armed forces. They were able to endure the United States' war of attrition. The United States could not. The ability of the Vietnamese, particularly the North Vietnamese, to continue fighting effectively despite punishing losses was not some secret fact. It could be readily determined (and in fact was) by estimating birthrates from records stored in French colonial archives. If this information had been provided to Congress in early 1965 as the American military began its military escalation, the debate over escalation might have been framed differently. Instead of being seen as a bold path to success, it might have been perceived as more than likely to fail. It is uncertain that this information alone would have changed American policy. But it is information, if enough members of Congress knew it, might have raised opposition to the attrition strategy. It is information that if it became widely circulated in the public media might have forced a change in military strategy preventing the loss of thousands upon thousands of lives. Why was the United States less sensitive than it should have been to the cultural contexts in which it is operating? Basically, the United States military assumed technological dominance and military might would trump cultural understanding. In fact, it proved to be the other way around. Reflecting on these failures suggests a critical a role for anthropologists. They can facilitate greater transparency so people in positions of power can look behind the claims of this or that policy proponent and assess what is actually going on. Transparency can lead to accountability and accountability can lead to a change of policy.

Anthropologists are not only well-versed in cultural contexts but they are independent of the American military. They have the ability to publicly challenge military claims. They can keep everyone, if not completely honest, at least relatively honest. They can speak truth to power (in the Quaker phrasing). Anthropologists can frame debates over strategy in comparative terms regarding what does and doesn't work within which contexts.

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CHAPTER REFLECTIONS:

- **The chapter has argued that cultural anthropology's analytical tools – participant-observation, contextual understanding, and comparison – have the potential to transform major social institutions for the better. They can make these institutions more transparent, more accountable. They can help solve serious social problems by perceiving the "big picture" dynamics behind a myriad of details.**

- **The chapter examines three case histories. The first focuses on the costs and problems of American education. It uses contextual understanding to examine why higher education costs so much today. It considers what students do (and do not) gain from their years in school as well as whether going to an "elite" school increases one's chances for success in later life. Using comparison, it then turns to Canada and the publicizing of cross-university test results regarding what students gain in school. The hope is that by bringing transparency to the education process, such information can facilitate greater accountability to higher education. By demonstrating less elite, less expensive schools often provide the same educational outcomes as more elite, expensive ones, students can help reframe the admissions process. Instead of competing for admission to elite schools,**

students draw colleges who offer the same educational outcomes to compete on cost. They need not collectively organized to reframe the process. It is something they can do, on their own, with certain information in hand.

- The second case study concerns the trillions of dollars spent on foreign aid. Why, despite good intentions, has foreign aid proved less effective than hoped? Part of the answer centers on the idealistic plans of the aid donors. They tend to focus on the money given more than what actually does (and does not) work on the ground. Participant-observation and contextual understanding offer aid agencies the information they need to learn from their mistakes. Focusing on Collier's *The Bottom Billion*, we saw how comparison can illuminate certain "traps" that limit developmet as well as steps we can take to overcome the "traps."

- The third case study centers on the Vietnam War. It asks why the United States lost the war when the United States military won every set battle it fought against opposing Vietnamese forces and could overwhelm the enemy with its technology and firepower. The short answer is that the American military failed to understand the Vietnamese forces aligned against them. This cultural ignorance was repeated in Iraq. In both cases, the American military was frequently groping in cultural darkness. If it had gathered more cultural information about the Vietnamese, particularly the ability of the North Vietnamese to quickly replace their losses, the American military could have shifted away from its search and destroy strategy and even made peace with an enemy who shared many of the same ideals. Unfortunately, the American military overly confident in its superior firepower never saw the need to adapt to adverse circumstances.

- We have seen how cultural anthropology's tools can help address key social concerns. They can bring to light the dysfunctions of major social institutions. Through understanding the dynamics at work, they can offer solutions. Contextual understanding facilitates transparency, which, in turn, facilitates accountability. Making sense of private behaviors in public ways allows you to grasp what is going on behind the obscuring veils created by social institutions seeking to project positive public images. As we saw with respect to foreign aid, Vietnam, and Iraq, anthropologists can report on what is, and is not, working on the ground. And they can help others lift the veil obscuring higher education so students can understand how to bring college costs down. Comparison, especially when it is entwined with contextual understanding, allows readers to grasp the "big picture" dynamics that lie behind scores of specifics. It can suggest effective solutions to complex problems. As we saw in Paul Collier's *The Bottom Billion*, comparison helps make sense of why foreign aid has not worked as well as it might. In comparing how the Americans fought in Vietnam and how the British fought in Malaysia, as John Nagl did in *Eating Soup With a Knife*, we perceive the reasons why the American military was reluctant to focus on understanding its opponents. By comparing American and Canadian systems of higher education, Americans can envision what a system of accountability might look like and take steps toward it.

- Cultural anthropologists can speak truth to power. As Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis famously wrote, "sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants" for addressing social problems. We saw the power of transparency in considering how David Halberstam's *The Best and the Brightest* and *The Making of a Quagmire*, Neil Jamieson's

Understanding Vietnam, Neil Sheehan's *A Bright Shining Lie*, and Stanley Karnow's *Vietnam: A History* allowed the American public to better understand the Vietnam War and why we lost it. One can't read Rajiv Chandrasekaran's *Imperial Life in the Emerald City* without questioning the managerial competence of the Coalition Provisional Authority that administered Iraq in 2003-2004. The same holds true regarding William Easterly's *The White Man's Burden*. Easterly's message is embedded in his book's subtitle: *Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good*. Derek Bok's *Our Underachieving Colleges*, Richard Hersh and John Merrow's *Declining by Degrees*, and Andrew Hacker's articles in the *New York Review of Books* all make it clear there are "smoke and mirrors" regarding how institutions of higher education present themselves to the public. Perceiving what lies behind their mystique draws us to demand greater social accountability from them.

- *The key question in such matters is: Will others listen?* There is no doubt that today we are frequently drowning in information. There is so much being reported on so many different subjects, that most people find it difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff – to separate out the significant from the extraneous. Still there are clear cases when making certain information public does make a significant difference. One can think, for example, of the Washington Post reporting on the Watergate Scandal that eventually led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon. One might also cite the New York Times publishing excerpts from the *Pentagon Papers* (a set of top secret documents passed to Neil Sheehan). The *Pentagon Papers* demonstrated that in respect to bombing North Vietnam, carpet bombing Cambodia, and coastal raids on North Vietnam the government

had purposely mislead the American people in its conduct of the Vietnam War. (Eventually a U.S. Senator entered the complete set of papers into the Senate record to further public discussion of them.)

- The key to getting readers to take note often lies less in what you disclose than in whom you disclose the information to. You should target your information to those most interested in it while being sure to present it in a form these interested parties can readily use. The value of targeted transparency – providing institutions with truthful, public information they need to discredit the claims of competitors – is that there is a ready group of individuals committed to publicizing it. In reporting on where foreign aid does (and does not) work, anthropologists might focus on reporting their information to organizations financially competing with those that wastefully spend aid grants. In the case of the Pentagon Papers, the New York Times was already opposed to the Vietnam War. It had a ready reason for highlighting the U.S. Government's deceptions. The same held for the U.S. Senator who put the *Pentagon Papers* into the public record. We will never know what might have happened if a few academics had disclosed to the developing congressional opposition to the Vietnam War in early 1965 the fatal flaw at the heart of Westmoreland's "search and destroy" attrition strategy. They might have made saved thousands of lives.

- Targeted transparency makes clear why anthropologists need reach out beyond policy makers to other constituencies in presenting their information. Providing information solely to policy makers (who then use it at their discretion) can be a dangerous tango. To have credibility – to really speak truth to power – cultural anthropologists can't be pawns

of the powerful. With their academic appointments and tenured positions, anthropologists can be respected, independent critics of the status quo. The irony of Chapter 2 is that we see mostly non-anthropologists applying cultural anthropology's analytical tool kit. This does not take away from the power of cultural anthropology's tools to do good. In fact, it enhances them because it emphasizes anyone – anthropologist or non-anthropologist alike – can apply these tools to good ends. We will return to this point in Chapter 4. But simply stated, anthropology frequently works best when it works with others – when its tools and insights are integrated into broader interdisciplinary projects.

Readers interested in obtaining additional details regarding the subjects covered in this chapter as well as the more than 335 references drawn on are encouraged to refer to: http://www.publicanthropology.org/WaPA/r.pdf