

Introduction to  
Anthropology:  
Holistic and Applied  
Research on Being  
Human

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Department of Anthropology

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## MODULE 2: A BRIEF HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY

### **The Origins of Anthropology**

Europeans and Americans of European descent developed Anthropology in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but anthropological thoughts can be traced back to ancient Greek philosophy. A primary principle behind anthropological thought emphasizes **the Other**, a term commonly used to reference people who are different, whether it is based on where they live, their appearance or customs. People typically contrast themselves to the Other as a means of bolstering their own identity and characterizing or stereotyping another group of people. Modern Anthropology includes focus on how “Other-ing” can be harmful and dangerous.

### **Pre-colonization**

Ancient Greeks are known to have harbored an **ethnocentric** perspective about their own natural superiority. Non-Greek cultures are seldomly mentioned in Greek discourse, except as “barbarians,” thereby illustrating an “us versus them” mentality. The ethnocentric perspective of the Greeks persisted through time and is evident in later Roman cultures, during the Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution, and even today. Additionally, the Greeks developed the foundations of scientific inquiry. The combination of ethnocentrism and scientific inquiry has significantly influenced our

understanding of the world today. For example, Aristotle established the Great Chain of Being (Figure 2.1), one of the most instrumental models in early biological typology studies. The Great Chain of Being is represented as a linear hierarchy that ranks all organisms in terms of their intelligence and perfection. Humans are depicted close to the top, near God, while more imperfect beings, such as worms or rocks, are depicted near the bottom. This concept was utilized and modified by early anthropologists, which is discussed further below and in the Race module.



**Figure 2.1.** Illustrations of Aristotle's Great Chain of Being depicting the perceived hierarchical relation between all manner of living creatures. Image from *Rhetorica Christiana* via Getty Research.

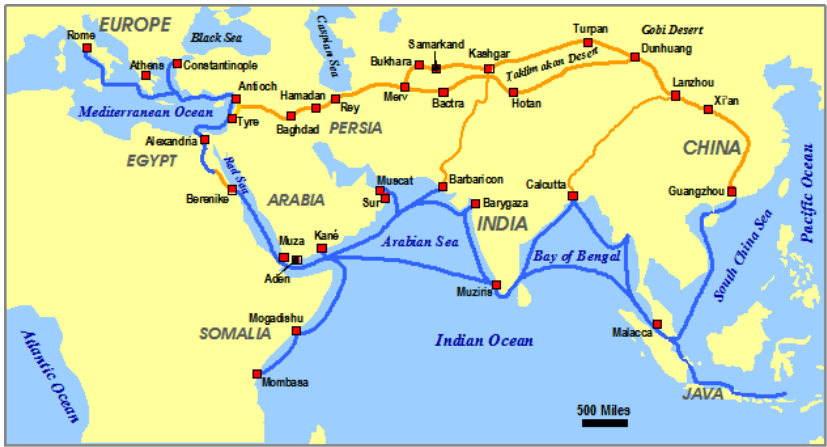
The notable exception to Greek ethnocentrism is Herodotus, an ancient historian born in the Persian Empire. He was interested in Egyptian, Scythian, Persian, and other “barbarian” cultures and traveled extensively for his time. Herodotus also provided an account of the Persian wars that was thoughtful and insightful rather than dehumanizing or demeaning. Additionally, he contrasted other groups of people in terms of their ethnic identity, language, religion, and culture rather than simply indicating that they were “inferior.” Herodotus’s work and perspectives were never standardized or recognized as anthropology. In fact, he is reported to have had a “foolish fondness for the marvelous” and was willing to believe in incredible stories without proof because he had seen so many marvels in the world (How and Wells 2008). However, his accounts do represent early iterations of anthropology and set him apart from other Greek historians and philosophers.

## **Colonialization**

European colonialism, **cultural imperialism**, and global expansion had a profound impact on the development of anthropology. As early as the 1300s and 1400s, during the Italian Renaissance, people recognized cultural and linguistic differences between people of the past and those in the present. However, as global awareness expanded, European peoples comprehended, as Herodotus had recognized almost a thousand years earlier, that differences also existed among contemporary, geographically disparate groups. People in different parts of the world looked and acted different and spoke incomprehensible languages. Early anthropologists sought to explain why this variation existed.

In fact, global expansion contributed on many levels to the development of anthropology, particularly racial classifications. For instance, prior to extensive maritime travel, people traveled on foot by land. The differences between pedestrian and sea travel illustrate how the concept of the Other transformed over time. For example, the Silk Road represented an incredibly diverse arrangement of peoples, languages, and cultures that extended from coastal China to the Mediterranean between AD 200 and 1000. This route impacted human society as we know it through the development of urban trade centers, political alliances, technological innovations, and religious

customs. When traveling by foot, a traveler is exposed to people with different cultures, languages, and appearances, but these differences appear as gradual changes between each stop along a route (Figure 2.2). In other words, it would be difficult to pinpoint exactly where and how people changed as you traveled along the Silk Road.



**Figure 2.2.** Illustration depicting differences in terrestrial (orange lines) versus maritime travel (blue lines) and how these different routes impacted our understanding of geographic differences in human culture and appearance. Image from Wikimedia Commons.

On the other hand, once maritime routes became popular, a traveler could begin in one location (e.g., Mediterranean) and end up in a totally different place (e.g., coastal China), while effectively bypassing the Silk Road and all human societies in between (see Figure 2.2). In these cases, the gradual variability observed between human societies on terrestrial routes would be lost because only the two end points are observed. The stories of Sinbad the Sailor, with their giants and cannibals, illustrate just how fantastical the Other-ing could be on this route. Maritime routes, therefore, emphasized the dramatic differences between groups of people to a new degree and facilitated designations of the Other. Additionally, upon European contact with the Americas, Australia, and Pacific Islands, Europeans were introduced to groups of people that had largely developed separately over ten thousand years from groups in Eurasia and Africa.

## The First Anthropologists

It has been suggested that anthropology emphasizes Western egocentric tendencies to separate what is perceived as external to itself. During the Enlightenment period (late 17<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries), lawyers, doctors, and other affluent individuals had the resources to dabble in fields like anthropology and geology as a hobby rather than a career. These individuals sought to contrast non-Western or non-European groups from Western (European) cultures, often, in dehumanizing or desensitizing ways. Then, in the late 1800s, anthropology exploded after drawing data from the expanding web of European colonialism, the Enlightenment perspective, and wealth from the Industrial Revolution.

These early anthropologists tried to understand the variety of human cultures through the lens of diffusion and evolution. According to these ideas, all human cultures around the world were evolving to be civilized and could trace their heritage back to one of a few major cultural centers in the world, such as Egypt or Rome. Many of these initial tenets and beliefs about human cultures are rejected by anthropologists today. However, even though many of these early ideas are no longer supported, it is important to understand how the field developed into the anthropology field as it is currently defined.

One of the most influential early anthropologists was **E.B. Tylor** (1832-1917), who authored the book *Primitive Culture* in 1871. This book represents one of the first attempts to define “culture” and describe cultural differences. Additionally, Tylor was fascinated by the origins of religion and examined groups around the world in an effort to explain how religion developed. In his work, Tylor compared what was known about cultures all around the world, in effect, creating lists of different ethnic groups in terms of their habits, beliefs, religion, art, customs, and geography.

European cultures stood at the pinnacle of human advancement in Tylor’s eyes. All other cultures were described as lower races or inferior groups using terms such as “barbaric” and “savage.” For example, he describes the Malay as “a very low level of culture.” He indicates that they may represent



“degraded” versions of their ancestors because the Malay claim their ancestors shipwrecked in the area after being harassed by pirates, but the Malay, at that time, didn’t possess maritime or agricultural technologies. However, Malay origins actually span multiple migrations and have rich cultural histories that were not appreciated by early anthropologists.

Tylor also ranked Native American groups based on linguistic and technological developments, indicating that some groups reached a “high barbaric level.” However, some groups had more sophisticated customs and complicated belief systems than credited. For example, the Iroquois political system influenced the formation of American democracy. The Iroquois, or Houdenosaunee, included several indigenous tribes who were committed to reducing conflict and eliminating warfare among themselves through non-violent means. Essentially, they created a treatise and maintained a peace that withstood several hundred years of tension, including European contact. Few European groups have ever been able to reach such agreements.

Although this dehumanizing categorization of people is inaccurate and ethnocentric, it laid the foundation for cross-cultural anthropological research (see Research Methods Module). These types of methods are still employed by anthropologists. The bias and belittling of other groups was later challenged by Franz Boas in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (see below) and is no longer acceptable within the field.

**Lewis Henry Morgan** (1818–1881) is another highly influential early anthropologist who practiced law as his primary career. He helped establish North American anthropology with his ethnographic study of the Iroquois peoples (*League of the Iroquois*, 1851) and stressed that, as European civilization spread across North America, Native cultures would perish. He urged people to document these cultures before they were lost. However, he is most well-known for developing the **unilinear theory of cultural evolution**, which was presented in his book *Ancient Society; or Researches in the Lines of Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization*, in 1877. In this book, he codified the idea that people were evolving for a purpose or towards a pinnacle of evolution. For example, he states, “it can now be asserted upon

convincing evidence that savagery preceded barbarism in all the tribes of mankind.” He presents savagery, barbarism, and civilization as three rungs on a progressive evolutionary ladder; in effect, he applied Aristotle’s Great Chain of Being to human cultures.

During colonial expansion, people became aware of the vast variability in human societies and cultures across the world. The unilineal theory of cultural evolution presented a mechanism to explain this variability, and a means to promote perceived European superiority as justification for colonialism. All cultures were compared against what Europeans perceived as the epitome of civilization: Europe. Contrary to Tylor, Morgan suggests that human societies did not degrade. Regardless of their own unique histories, some cultures were simply more or less evolved than others. Furthermore, if only a few groups around the world had reached civilized status, he argued that it was Europe’s duty to help these other cultures evolve to a more advanced state through the introduction of European government and Christian religion.

In addition to the clear ethnocentrism and racism underlying Morgan’s unilineal model of cultural evolution, the model failed to explain change in the very cultures that Morgan studied. Based on the traits that Morgan used to define his categories of savagery, barbarism, and civilization, some Native American groups jumped from “savagery” to “civilization” because of contact with Europeans. By skipping the “barbarism” stage, they violated Morgan’s model. This shows how science and scientific conclusions are a product of their times. Thankfully, science is also self-correcting, and anthropology has moved away from these models.

At first glance, you might agree with Morgan’s assumption that people are evolving towards a more perfect form of human. After all, media often presents the idea that we are perfecting humanity as scientists study stem cells and genetic engineering with the goal of annihilating infectious disease and increasing desirable traits. Even designer babies are closer to reality than they ever have been before. However, beyond the significant bioethical concerns, these pretenses avoid the fact that we, as a species, are not evolving towards perfection. Perfection is situationally defined (see Hominin Evolution Module), and we have no idea what lies in the future. We are adapting to

new situations and challenges as they arise. The adaptations that benefit us now, as a species, may be insignificant or even harmful to us in the future. We can't predict how climate change, disease, war, or continuous cultural change will impact the world around us, so we can't predict what will be the most advantageous way to be human in the future. This is well illustrated by the recent COVID-19 global pandemic. Unprepared both physiologically and culturally to deal with this pandemic, the United States has grappled with techniques to protect its citizens, including teleworking, social distancing, and face coverings (see Evolution Module).

Influenced by views such as Morgan's stages of social evolution, some early anthropological inquiry led to the "scientific" classification of human races (see Race Module). Early race studies were largely based on the foundations of biological taxonomy and ancient Greek thought with the goal of classifying different "races" of human. Anthropologists attempted to scientifically prove that separate human populations were, in fact, a different species of humans. However, this **scientific racism** is not valid science and is not accepted within the field today.

**Samuel G. Morton** (1799-1851) was a key player in this movement. A professor of anatomy at the Pennsylvania Medical College in Philadelphia, Morton is most infamous for his **craniometric studies**. With his colleagues, Morton collected more than 800 human skulls from around the world during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. He grouped the skulls into five "racial" groups. Initially, the skulls were measured and their cranial capacity was assessed by filling the crania with seeds, but later, Morton switched to lead shot because he felt this provided a more accurate and reliable estimate. The results of these experiments provided variable results. According to Morton, "Caucasians" had the largest mean capacity in both experiments, but the capacities of the other groups varied significantly. After measuring the skulls, he posited that distinct racial differences, such as white and Black, were evident, and these differences represented the natural order of racial hierarchy and proof that multiple human species existed. These results were consistent with other **phrenology** studies of the time.

Morton's controversial work initially received positive attention among academics, politicians, and general society. While Morton's work has been

interpreted to represent differences in intelligence, Morton himself did not equate cranial capacity this way. However, he was biased towards the superiority of White races, and politics at the time privileged Whiteness. Therefore, his results dovetailed with contemporary politics. Morton's research into racial hierarchy, and other research like it, was used as a tool of white supremacy that justified the forcible relocation of Native American groups and enslavement of African and Native American individuals.

In the years following these types of racialized studies, researchers have disagreed over the accuracy and validity of these studies. Stephen J. Gould argued vehemently about Morton's implicit bias and manipulated data. He felt that Morton focused more on his personal beliefs rather than objective science. Gould suggested that the different methods of measuring crania resulted in prejudiced results. However, other researchers have suggested that Gould himself was indisposed towards Morton, and that Morton conducted accurate science, but was highly influenced by social politics of the time. Today, there is no place for race-based "science" in Anthropology.

**Cyrus Thomas** (1825-1910), on the other hand, was an American entomologist who was hired by the Bureau of American Ethnology to solve a question that captivated the minds of the general public in the late 1800s. As early as the 1540s, Hernando de Soto documented large piles of mounded earth in North America that clearly were not naturally occurring, but it wasn't until the late 1700s that colonists began to take interest in these features. Early European Americans were intrigued by giant mounds that rivaled houses in size (or could comfortably accommodate a large house) and other types of raised mounds shaped like snakes or bears that were best appreciated from an aerial view. Who had built the mounds, how old were they, and what was their purpose?

Thus, the myth of the Moundbuilders: a fictional group, unrelated to Native Americans, that built the earthen mounds across eastern North America. Some of these features, like Monk's Mound at Cahokia in Illinois are bigger than Egyptian pyramids. Others, like the 1700-ft snake-shaped Serpent Mound in Ohio, have spectacular man-made forms that European

Americans could not explain or fathom. The mysteries were fueled by the fact that no one lived at these sites. Many of the surrounding villages were abandoned and crumbling into ruins by the late 1700s. Furthermore, according to the colonists, the Native American groups who lived near the mounds at the time had no information about them.

As European settlers moved across the landscape and displaced Native tribes, the Moundbuilders myths helped justify this expulsion and expansion. European Americans believed that these sites were built in the past by a “more civilized” group of people rather than Native Americans because Native individuals had no history with, nor knowledge of the mound features whose sites had been largely abandoned. Therefore, Native Americans could not have a long, deep-historical connection to the land. In response, European colonists became interested in an earlier, more “civilized” group that had long since disappeared from North America and had perhaps been expelled by the arrival of Native Americans.

The Moundbuilders myth was featured in news stories around the country. Local news accounts indicated that the mounds were built by everyone from giants to the Vikings to the Lost Tribes of Israel. Everyone, that is, except for Native Americans, who were deemed incapable of such feats. Newspaper photos purportedly revealed images of giant skeletons excavated from inside mound burials who left preserved footprints on sites. European Americans took pride in having mounds on their property. Even Thomas Jefferson performed scientific excavations of mounds to document burial customs and clear up the many rumors swirling around the mounds.

For more than 100 years, people speculated about the mounds. Finally, in the 1880s, the Smithsonian Institution established the Bureau of American Ethnology and hired Cyrus Thomas, an entomologist with an interest in archaeology, to unravel the mystery of the mounds. By this point, many assumptions were bandied around as if they were fact and supported the idea that a highly evolved and enlightened, long-vanished race had created these mounded relics. People believed that the mounds were older than Native American groups and that the engineering, aesthetic, and technical-level construction of the mounds were beyond the abilities of Native groups; that

many mounds contained inscribed tablets, but Native Americans did not possess writing skills. It was also believed that some of the mounds and associated artifacts featured animals such as elephants, which were not found in North America, and that fine-metal artifacts made of gold, bronze, and iron existed in the mounds, but Native Americans had no knowledge of metallurgy. Additionally, assumptions were made that the sheer size and spatial distribution of mounds across the Americas indicated a centralized government, which was not practiced by Native groups.

Thomas set out to resolve these assumptions and determine, once and for all, who built the mounds (see Figure 2.3). He spent years with a team of amateur archaeologists carefully documenting and excavating thousands of mound sites across North America. In the conclusion of his work, Thomas demonstrated the flawed assumptions and fraudulent behaviors that fueled the Moundbuilders myth. Native Americans had built the mounds, and they had all the competence and aesthetic finesse required to complete this. Furthermore, the tablets and impossible animal representations were all proven to be fabricated deceptions. No fine-metal artifacts were found in mounds, although metal working, such as the cold hammering of copper, was practiced. Any iron or bronze artifacts were traced to recent European origins.



**Figure 2.3. 1870 camp scene with Cyrus Thomas. Image modified from U.S. Geological Survey.**

With the mystery solved, many European Americans felt that the reality was much less exciting than early assumptions. Thomas' work had some seriously detrimental unintended consequences as European populations lost interest in the mounds. They were no longer seen as a point of pride, rather, the general public reasoned that if "inferior" groups had built the mounds, then they weren't actually as special or exotic as believed. In response, people no longer protected and advertised the mounds. Instead, countless sites were destroyed for farmland and other development projects. However, several archaeologists attempted to collect the human remains and artifacts from these sites before their destruction, which led to the rise of **salvage ethnography** and Native American exhibits in natural history museums (see NAGPRA, below).

The impact of these types of racialized studies can still be seen and felt today, and debates and concerns still exist due to the sociohistorical reality of these racial labels. However, the scientific nature of these race-based studies

and/or their subsequent interpretations have largely been discredited in the field.

## **Anthropology as an Established Discipline**

Anthropology continued to grow in interest among early practitioners, and by the early 20th century, formal anthropology departments were being established within universities throughout the United States and Europe. During this time, anthropology branched in different directions as practitioners sought to clarify the discipline, its purpose in society, and appropriate methods and perspectives. However, research was often born out of curiosity rather than desire to do right by indigenous cultures. In many cases, the results of these studies, like Samuel G. Morton's craniometric research, were used by governments to forward political agendas.

For example, **Bronislaw Malinowski** (1884-1942), known as the founder of **social anthropology**, studied anthropology between 1910 and 1916 at the newly established program at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Malinowski was instrumental in the development of **ethnography**, and he trained a generation of students, some of whom went on to have careers as illustrious as his. He spent more than two years living among and studying the Trobriand Islanders of Papua New Guinea, practicing **participant observation**, and documenting the Kula Ring (Figure 2.4) (See the Methods and Social Classification Module).





**Figure 2.4. Bronislaw Malinowski and individuals of the Trobriand Islands in 1928. Image from Wikimedia Commons.**

From his experiences, Malinowski refined the concept of **functionalism**, which suggests that every aspect of society contributes and depends on every other aspect of that society to create a stable and functioning unit. For example, citizens of a country pay taxes to their government, and the government uses those funds to create infrastructure that facilitate life within that culture. The government builds mass transit structures – roads, trains, etc. – and people use these structures to get to work, earn money, and pay taxes. The government funds public schools, and children go to school to learn the rules of society, which allows them to get jobs, earn money, and pay taxes. The government subsidizes certain agricultural products, like corn or soybeans, to help reduce the risks of farming, such as weather and disease. These funds help farms survive in times of hardship, so that they can continue to produce food to feed people, who need food to survive so they can work, and so on. Essentially, functionalism dictates that all aspects of societies interact with one another in feedback loops, like gears in a machine, to ensure the survival of the whole system.



**Video 2.1. Check out what anthropologists do with MIT Anthropology’s “Doing Anthropology” video for more details!**

However, like Morton’s studies, Malinowski’s work was used to justify colonial politics and validate racist ideologies. He indicated that it was the duty of anthropologists to document colonization efforts because indigenous cultures were too simple to do so. Although some have argued that Malinowski’s approach and perspective grievously damaged the validity of the discipline, others have argued that his actions helped cultivate a more mindful anthropology. Malinowski’s personal perspective shifted throughout his lifetime, as he worked with groups living in places as varied as the Trobriand Islands and Kenya. By the end of his career, he indicated that anthropologists must not only interpret multi-faceted indigenous cultures, but also be their champion in the face of colonization.

### **The Rise of Cultural Relativism**

Not all anthropological research has been plagued to such a degree by such adverse political and social consequences (but it is still crucial to consider these possibilities). In 1902, **Franz Boas** (1858-1942; see Figure 2.5) became the head of Columbia University’s anthropology department—the first formally established anthropology department in the United States. The paradigms set forth by Boas challenged the biased development of anthropology and combatted **deterministic** ideas, such as the Great Chain of Being, from being applied to human cultures.



**Figure 2.5. Franz Boas, one of the founding fathers of American anthropology. Image from Flickr/Curran.**

Through his studies, he developed the idea of **cultural relativism** (see Module 1: Introduction to Anthropology), which ran counter to the conventional anthropological thoughts of his time. Boas criticized individuals like Morgan, Morton, Tylor, and others who used their research to support racist ideologies. Boas indicated that groups did not evolve in predictable manners, they could not all be traced back to a major cultural center in history, and their cranial size did not directly correlate with intelligence. Instead, Boas argued that biology and culture are independent, and traditions and social learning are impacted more heavily by culture than genetics. This idea, which he coined **historical particularism**, posits that each culture is the unique product of its own history. All traditions and behaviors within a culture started because they served a function in society; often, traditions may continue even if the reasoning behind it has been forgotten.

For example, iodine is an important micronutrient that is linked to thyroid functioning and brain development. Iron deficiencies can result in enlarged thyroid glands, known as goiters, which were once described as a major cause of human suffering and pain (see Figure 2.6). However, human bodies cannot synthesize iodine, and people must obtain it from other sources. While it is commonly found in coastal resources, such as seaweed, many inland regions are devoid of this element. In the 1920s, the Great Lakes region was known as the “goiter belt” due to the number of iron-deficiency cases.



**Figure 2.6. Individual with goiter, associated with iodine deficiency-induced hypothyroidism. Image from Flickr/King.**

Human cultures have found diverse ways to incorporate iodine into their diets, which reflect their cultural values and beliefs about health and medicine. Thousands of years ago, both Chinese and Greek cultures report eating seaweed and burnt sea sponges to decrease goiters. Today in the United States, trace amounts of iodine are added to table salt to help people receive enough of this micronutrient. Salt was selected as the carrier in the 1920s because researchers reasoned that salt was used by all Americans on a daily basis; therefore, it presented an efficient and cost-effective means of

supplementing the American diet no matter their geographic location or socio-economic status. Salt has a complex history for many groups around the world with significant economic, religious, and symbolic qualities. However, not all countries today add iodine to salt. Iodine has been added to oils in Romania, water in Italy, tea in China, sugar in Guatemala and the Sudan, and even into animal feed to produce iodine-enriched milk in northern Europe and the UK.

Although most Americans may recognize that iodine has been added to their table salt, the history of why and how this practice came to be is largely forgotten among the general population. Furthermore, how iodine is incorporated into other society's diets varies based on their history and perspectives. Therefore, concepts such as unilineal evolution must be incorrect because cultures function on their own terms. Whether you add iodine to table salt or tea or take it in directly from natural sources, the important thing is that you have developed a tradition that works for your society. One way is not necessarily better than another, but it does reflect local values and geography. In other words, comparing two cultures to understand evolution, progress, and civilization is like comparing apples and oranges.

When Boas practiced anthropology at Columbia University, people in the United States were worried about interracial marriage. Southern and Eastern European immigrants arrived in the U.S., and many worried that these groups would weaken Western European racial standards. The public held to notions of biological race and unilineal cultural development because they had not embraced ideas like historical particularism. In response to a congressional hearing, Boas designed a study to measure the cranial morphology of immigrant families and assess the racial stock of immigrants.

Boas approached this project with a critical mindset and new perspectives about race and culture. He compared the cranial measurements of siblings where one child was born in America and the other was born in their ethnic homeland. He discovered that the cranial measurements of siblings born in America differed from their European-born siblings. Boas concluded that human skulls were plastic or malleable, and he attributed these findings to

environment rather than race or biology. In other words, skull shape could not be used to assess race, intellect, or biology reliably. These findings went against popular beliefs and demonstrated that variation is greater within groups instead of between groups. Through this work, Boas contributed to the destabilization of a long-held belief about human races.

Additionally, many of Boas's students were renowned in their own rights for groundbreaking research. For example, **Ruth Benedict** (1887-1948) conducted an ethnographic study on the character of Japan during World War II and was long credited with saving Kyoto from an atomic attack (though this was later refuted). **Margaret Mead** (1901-1978) lived among Samoan groups to study emotional development and sexual relationships and later became a prominent public anthropologist. While these early studies are not without their own flaws, they represent a significant shift in anthropological theory and development and how anthropology can shift public opinion in positive ways.

The summary of Anthropology's history to this point follows a pretty standard trajectory of highlighting male, English-speaking, European Americans even where other contemporaneous individuals were establishing similar ideas or research designs and can be found in many anthropological textbooks. There is, however, a movement in Anthropology to find a less racist and sexist history of the field by including more women and authors of color and less white men among assigned readings. For example, **Zora Neale Hurston** (1891-1960) was a well-known novelist but also a student of Boas at Columbia University and utilized ethnography in many of her works. It is also possible to cover many of Lewis Henry Morgan's themes by discussing **Charles Eastman** who was named Hakadah at birth and given the name Ohíye S'a as a youth or by swapping **W.E.B. Dubois** for Franz Boas. As with much of history, there were many people having similar ideas at the same time, so the individual is less important than the ideas, except, the individuals do matter in terms of who is highlighted and how we construct our history and culture. So, an inclusive Anthropology should include a range of founders. Beyond using diverse voices to teach Anthropology, anthropologists now strive to honor the diversity, equity, and inclusion found in their work.

## Anthropology Today

Today, many anthropologists work with cultural groups to enrich their research and tackle relevant social problems with multiple, robust perspectives to ensure satisfactory outcomes for all interested parties. However, as previously noted, this has not always been the case. For example, the rise of salvage ethnography represented the good intentions of anthropologists to document dying Native American languages and cultures as these groups were dislocated and assimilated into European culture and their homes and history were demolished on the landscape. However, rarely did these anthropologists seek input from indigenous cultures about how to document and preserve those cultures, and the peoples and their cultures were not always treated with respect.

Many aspects of Native American cultures were displayed in museum or fair exhibits. While today museum collections may be the only repositories of culture and human skeletal remains of these cultural groups, some argue that the negative outcomes outweigh the cultural preservation. For example, museum displays were often found in Natural History museums, as if Native Americans were outside of humanity. Fair exhibits, such as at the World's Fair or "living zoos," were often used as attractions where European groups could marvel at the "primitive" exotic and feel a sense of racial superiority.

While archaeologists, cultural anthropologists, historians, and others recognized the importance of documenting Native cultures, these processes have a long and complicated development within the U.S. Since 1906, numerous laws have been enacted to preserve and protect archaeological artifacts, significant sites (1906 Antiquities Act, 1966 National Register of Historic Places, etc.), and Indigenous rights (1978 American Indian Religious Freedom Act, 2010 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples). One of the most important laws is the **Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA)**, which passed in 1991. This law dictated that museums and other federally funded organizations must return Native American skeletal remains and associated grave goods back to the appropriate nation. While these laws and movements are not without issues, they have encouraged people to recognize the humanity of indigenous groups and past atrocities to their ancestors and culture. Even if the remains

were salvaged to avoid destruction in earlier times, it is long overdue that those remains be returned to appropriate cultural groups for reburial.

The **Kennewick Man** case is an excellent example to expose the flaws with NAGPRA and the desensitized perspective of some anthropologists. Kennewick Man, also referred to as “the Ancient One” is the nearly complete skeleton of a person who died approximately 9,000 years ago near the Columbia River in Kennewick, Washington. When his remains were found in 1996, he became a test case for the recently passed NAGPRA. The skeleton was to be transferred to local Native American nations under NAGPRA, but a group of anthropologists sued the government for control of the remains. The anthropologists argued that the Kennewick Man was so ancient that he could not be associated with any modern tribe. This decision allowed scientists to continue studying the remains against the wishes of Native Americans and significantly hurt relationships between anthropologists and Native Americans. However, advances in science and the law did eventually return the skeleton to his descendants: a 2015 DNA study linked him to the indigenous nations in the region where he was found, and he was reburied by his descendants in 2017.

The **Carlisle School** project represents an alternative way for anthropologists and indigenous groups to interact and collaborate. Native boarding schools were established across the U.S. to force the **assimilation** of Native American youth into European American culture. This led to a significant loss of indigenous culture, language, and tradition. Students given names were forbidden and they were forced to adopt Anglo-American names, Christian religions, European clothing and haircuts, and they were subject to harsh, military discipline to promote European American values. The U.S. government pushed the idea that to save Native peoples, they must become Anglo-Americanized and abandon their “inferior” ways of life.

The Carlisle Indian Industrial School is in Carlisle, PA (see Figure 2.7) operated between 1879 and 1918 and was the first, non-reservation boarding school in the nation. More than 10,000 students from 141 Native nations were enrolled. Today, the school is best known for Olympic athlete, baseball and football legend Jim Thorpe. However, the school also has a dark



history. Dovetailing with unilineal evolution tenants, Lieutenant Colonel Richard Henry Pratt, a Civil War veteran, believed he was helping save Native children from “savage” customs and created a regimented school system to subject Native children to new cultural standards. In actuality, the poor conditions and brutal regulations of the school led to the deaths of hundreds of children and, ironically, represented a savage and barbaric institution. Today, approximately 150 graves are located on the campus.



**Figure 2.7.** Students in front of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, no date. Image from Wikimedia Commons.

Elizabeth DiGangi, a forensic anthropologist with Binghamton university, has been working with a team since 2017 to excavate human remains from the graves at the Carlisle School. The team is working with members of the Northern Arapaho tribe from Wyoming who requested these excavations to recover the remains of their kin. The loss of family is a wound that stays with families for generations, and DiGangi credits current anthropological perspectives and approaches for their utility in helping these families find closure after horrific events of the past.

Additionally, this work helps improve our knowledge of historical events and provides some degree of justice and closure for both the families and society. The Arapaho were specifically concerned with graves they believed contained three boys: Little Chief (14 years), Horse (11 years), and Little

Plume (9 years), whose names they were not allowed to use at the Carlisle School. However, the school cemetery was relocated in 1927, so the families and archaeologists had no guarantee that the graves or bones could still be located. Over several months and a series of excavations, DiGangi and her team were able to identify skeletal remains that matched the characteristics of the three boys.

The **Pimu Catalina Island Archaeology Project** provides a great example of how Native Americans can promote their own interests. It is organized by professional, Indigenous archaeologists and others that combine their scientific and indigenous knowledge and practices. The project has trained nearly 100 archaeologists to date. Additionally, the project demonstrates how archaeologists can be more respectful and cooperative with Native groups and align research goals to benefit all invested parties. The project represents the collaboration of scientific practices and indigenous knowledge to understand the groups who lived in the region 8,000 years ago, understand how they adapted to climatic fluctuations, and ensure that displaced or salvaged human remains are returned to their descendants. The principal investigators teach students to incorporate a more holistic approach with an emphasis on legal intricacies.

For example, while NAGPRA recognizes and attempts to ameliorate the injustices and issues related to the taking of skeletal remains for museum collections in the past, the Pimu project has unearthed additional concerns. Some of the curated skeletal remains cannot be clearly associated with specific nations or cultural groups. Furthermore, Native nations who do not have federal recognition, such as the Gabrielino/Tongva, who are affiliated with the Pimu project, cannot claim skeletal remains that were removed from their ancestral homelands. In the endeavor to have their ancestors returned from museums and collections around the world, the tribes also realized that many of these curated collections were poorly documented, with location information missing, wrong, or difficult to decipher. These issues with cultural association, federal recognition, and poor record keeping expose the inadequacy of existing practices and highlight the need to improve procedures. They argue that this lack of concern further necessitates the needs for tribes to have control of their own history. Read Desiree Martinez's perspectives on being a Tongva archaeologist and see the

following video:



**Video 2.2. Check out the video about members of the Tongva tribe as they discuss repatriation of remains online for more details!**

Despite rocky beginnings, anthropology has cultivated itself into a field that is now more sensitive to the needs of its informants, the value of different cultures, and its potential contributions in a globalized world. Through continuous reflection and interpretation, anthropology is aware of itself as a discipline in a way that few other disciplines are. Anthropologists learn about other cultures and assist those groups to identify and resolve social concerns, aid in communications between disparate groups to prevent miscommunication, and avoid and improve from the initial demeaning and insensitive origins of the discipline.

To that end, many anthropologists today can also be viewed as activists who help support the voices of their collaborators among broader, global stages. **Engaged anthropology** refers to the application of anthropological theory, method, and investigation to help promote social equity and human rights. For example, in *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies*, physician anthropologist Seth Holmes follows indigenous migrants across the United States-Mexican border. He explores how the health of migrant workers is impacted by their position as insecure labor in the agricultural industry, and he illuminates the importance of understanding the role that broader social structures play in shaping people's health. Another example of engaged anthropology is anthropologist Holly Barker's long-term applied anthropology work in the Marshall Islands. By documenting people's experiences with the U.S. nuclear weapons testing program there in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Barker's work provides a critical resource for Marshallese communities to advocate for the resources they need to recover from the legacy of radiation on their lands and bodies.

In cultural anthropology, we don't conduct research on groups of people, we learn from people. As a method, ethnography is well poised to engage questions of power, inequality, and representation because it centers the

voices of those who are impacted by policies but not at the table where policies are developed. Ethnography can correct the tunnel vision of top-down methods by considering perspectives and experiences from the ground up.

Regardless of which approach anthropologists take today, they remain cognizant of their ethical duties to interpret data in a manner that resonates with those cultural groups today or their descendants. The goal of anthropology isn't to tell the story of a culture or their past, rather, the goal is to help those groups to communicate and tell their own stories. After all, there is no objective truth. Furthermore, anthropologists are not "saviors" of other cultures, nor are they helping lift other groups to more "civilized" states. Anthropologists are skilled in methods and analytical approaches to help uncover robust, holistic views of culture, and the weight of doing right by those cultural groups (whether living or long dead) is a heavy ethical burden to bear.

## Review Questions

- **T/F.** Cultural imperialism refers to the rapid spread or advance of one culture at the expense of others.
- **T/F.** The idea of the “Other” has been used to validate differential treatment of people throughout history.
- **T/F.** Although race-based theories and ideas of unilineal progress are debunked by anthropologists today, the legacy of these theories still impacts people today.
- **T/F.** Anthropological research demonstrates how cultures around the world are evolving and attaining new standards of civilization and technological advancements because of global interactions.
- **T/F.** The Kennewick Man case represents how scientists and indigenous groups can peacefully resolve questions about the ownership of ancient human remains.

## Discussion Questions

- How did maritime travel, compared to terrestrial travel, impact our understanding of human cultural variation?
- What is the idea of unilineal cultural evolution? Why is this theory no longer accepted in anthropology today?
- How was the research of anthropologists like Malinowski and Morton used to influence social policy and beliefs? Why must anthropologists be careful in how they interpret and present their data?
- How does Kennewick Man highlight the importance of legislation such as NAGPRA?
- How does early anthropological work vary from present-day anthropological research? Consider goals, methods, and theoretical orientations? Why is this shift important?
- How can anthropologists effectively interface with indigenous groups and other interested parties? Why is this interface important?
- What ethical obligations do anthropologists have? To whom do they have these obligations?

## Activities

1. This chapter discusses how indigenous groups have been treated by European groups in the past. Federal legislation, like NAGPRA, aims to rectify that treatment. Are these concerns still relevant today? Review these articles and discuss the challenges associated with political recognition and ownership of ancient human remains.
  - <https://www.npr.org/2021/04/17/988123599/unrecognized-tribes-struggle-without-federal-aide-during-pandemic>
  - <https://www.yesmagazine.org/democracy/2016/12/19/some-unrecognized-tribes-still-waiting-after-130-years>
  - <https://theconversation.com/museums-are-returning-indigenous-human-remains-but-progress-on-repatriating-objects-is-slow-67378>
2. The remains of Kennewick Man fueled an ethical debate about the ownership of archaeological human remains. Other archaeological finds have not been so contentious. Review these two articles, one detailing the case of Kennewick Man and the other describing an indigenous ice mummy discovered in British Columbia named Kwáaday Dän T's'ínchi. How did scientists and indigenous groups interact in each case? What lessons can we learn from these two vastly different interactions?
  - <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/kennewick-man-finally-freed-share-his-secrets-180952462/>
  - <https://secretsoftheice.com/news/2020/01/08/iceman-british-columbia/>

## Key Terms

**Assimilation:** The adoption of the language, culture, and ethnic identity of the dominant group in a society by other groups or individuals.

**Benedict, Ruth (1887-1948):** An American anthropologist, trained under Boaz, who researched culture and personality.

**Boaz, Franz (1858-1942):** Considered to be the father of American anthropology, he introduced the concepts of cultural relativism and historical particularism.

**Carlisle Indian Industrial School (1879-1918):** The flagship Native American boarding school in the United States, associated with assimilation of indigenous traditions.

**Colonization:** The action or process of settling among, invading, or establishing foreign control over the indigenous people of an area.

**Craniometry:** The measuring of skulls.

**Cultural Imperialism:** The rapid spread or advance of one culture at the expense of others

**Cultural Relativism:** The idea that cultures must be understood on their own terms and based on their own contexts instead of being judged by the standards of a different culture.

**Determinism:** The philosophical perspective that every event, including human action, is caused by external forces. All humans and other species are influenced and react to external stimuli.

**DuBois, W.E.B. (1868-1963):** An African American sociologist, historian, author, editor, and activist, known for his extensive work on race relations.

**Eastman, Charles (1858-1939):** The first Native American physician to be certified in Western medicine as well as a prolific author of works on Native American life and culture.

**Ethnocentric:** Evaluating other people's cultures or ethnic groups according to the belief that one's own culture or ethnic group is superior.

**Ethnography:** The study and systematic description, through written observations, of the customs of individual cultures, societies, or communities.

**Functionalism:** Cultures develop to maximize biological, psychological, and social advantages for a group of people and promote specific values.

**Great Chain of Being:** Developed by Aristotle, this perspective organizes all matter and life into a hierarchical structure from the most primitive to the most divine.

**Historical Particularism:** Also called historicism, this idea suggests each culture is the unique product of their own history. Therefore, cultures should be studied on their own terms, rather than in comparison with another culture.

**Hurston, Zora Neale (1891-1960):** An African American novelist and leader in the Harlem Renaissance.

**Kennewick Man:** A set of human skeletal remains, more than 9,000 years old, that sparked an ethical debate about who owns the past.

**Malinowski, Bronislaw (1884-1942):** A British anthropologist who developed the concepts of functionalism and intense ethnographic fieldwork.

**Mead, Margaret (1901-1978):** An American anthropologist, trained under Boaz, who studied people of Oceania and later became a prominent public anthropologist

**Morgan, Lewis Henry (1818-1881):** A pioneering early anthropologist who discussed social evolution and conducted research on kinship and social structures.

**Morton, Samuel George (1799-1851):** An American physician and naturalist who contributed to racial tensions through his craniometric studies, wherein he incorrectly tried to prove that different races of humans were different species.

**Myth of the Moundbuilder:** A 19<sup>th</sup> century interpretation that the elaborate mounds and earthworks found across North America were built by a lost civilization unrelated to the indigenous American cultures who lived in these areas at the time of European contact.



**Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1991 (NAGPRA):** A federal law that establishes ownership of archaeological Indigenous American human remains and cultural items from burial sites, with the intent of protecting these sites and objects.

**Other (“Othering”):** Human tendency to alienate and treat a group of people different based on perceived differences that these groups do not represent normal behaviors or cultures.

**Participant Observation:** An ethnographic research method where researchers join a cultural group and participate to learn first-hand about a culture.

**Phrenology:** A pseudoscience primarily focused on measurements of the human skull as a supposed indication of mental abilities and character traits.

**Pimu Catalina Island Archaeology Project:** A project designed to integrate scientific practice with indigenous knowledge to better understand the history of indigenous Americans who lived in the area over thousands of years.

**Salvage Ethnography:** Documenting and recording the practices and cultural beliefs of groups threatened with assimilation or extinction, often because of globalization.

**Scientific Racism:** The pseudoscientific belief that empirical evidence exists to justify or support racism.

**Social Anthropology (or Cultural and Sociocultural):** The study of human cultures in the present through participation, observation, and interview of living people.

**Thomas, Cyrus (1825-1910):** A pioneering early anthropologist who debunked the myth of the moundbuilder.

**Tylor, Edward Burnett (1832-1917):** A pioneering early anthropologist who discussed social evolution and helped established the field of cultural anthropology.

**Unilinear Theory of Cultural Evolution:** A debunked theory that all human societies evolved in a similar trajectory from primitive hunter gatherers towards literate civilizations.

## Suggested Readings

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## Videos

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