

ESSENTIALS OF

# CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

A TOOLKIT FOR A GLOBAL AGE



KENNETH J. GUEST

# **Essentials of Cultural Anthropology**



# Essentials of Cultural Anthropology

A Toolkit for a Global Age

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**Kenneth J. Guest**

Baruch College  
The City University of New York



W. W. Norton & Company  
New York • London

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Printed in the United States of America.

First Edition

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Design Director: Hope Miller Goodell

Book Design: Kiss Me I'm Polish LLC

Photo Editor: Trish Marx

Permissions Manager: Megan Jackson

Composition: Jouve

Manufacturing: RR Donnelley Kendallville

Permission to use copyrighted material is included on p. A29.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Guest, Kenneth J.

Essentials of cultural anthropology : a toolkit for a global age / Kenneth J. Guest, Baruch College, The City University of New York.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

**ISBN 978-0-393-26501-9 (pbk.)**

1. Ethnology. 2. Applied anthropology. 3. Globalization. I. Title.

GN316.G845 2016

305.8—dc23

2015023572

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010-0017

wwnorton.com

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., Castle House, 75/76 Wells Street, London W1T 3QT

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

# About the Author

Kenneth J. Guest is professor of anthropology at Baruch College, The City University of New York, and author of *God in Chinatown: Religion and Survival in New York's Evolving Immigrant Community* (NYU Press, 2003). His research focuses on immigration, religion, globalization, ethnicity, and entrepreneurialism.

Professor Guest's ethnographic research in China and the United States traces the immigration journey of recent Chinese immigrants from Fuzhou, southeast China, who, drawn by restaurant, garment shop, and construction jobs and facilitated by a vast human smuggling network, have revitalized New York's Chinatown. His writing explores the role of Fuzhounese religious communities in China and the United States; the religious revival sweeping coastal China; the Fuzhounese role in the rapidly expanding U.S. network of all-you-can-eat buffets and take-out restaurants; and the higher-education experiences of the Fuzhounese second generation.

A native of Florida, Professor Guest studied Chinese at Beijing University and Middlebury College. He received his B.A. from Columbia University (East Asian Languages and Cultures), an M.A. from Union Theological Seminary (Religious Studies), and the M.A., M.Phil., and Ph.D. from The City University of New York Graduate Center (Anthropology).





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# Preface

Anthropology may be the most important course you take in college. That may seem like a bold statement. But here's what I mean.

## **CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY: A TOOLKIT**

The world in the twenty-first century is changing at a remarkable pace. We are experiencing an interaction with people, ideas, and systems that is intensifying at breathtaking speed. Communication technologies link people instantaneously across the globe. Economic activities challenge national boundaries. People are on the move within countries and between them. As a result, today we increasingly encounter the diversity of humanity, not on the other side of the world but in our schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, religious communities, and families. How will we develop the skills and strategies for engaging and navigating the complex, multicultural, global, and rapidly changing reality of the world around us?

Anthropology is the toolkit you are looking for. Cultural anthropology is the study of humans, particularly the many ways people around the world today and throughout human history have organized themselves to live together: to get along, to survive, to thrive, and to have meaningful lives. *Essentials of Cultural Anthropology: A Toolkit for a Global Age* will introduce you to the fascinating work of anthropologists and the research strategies and analytical perspectives that anthropologists have developed—our tools of the trade—that can help you better understand and engage today's world as you move through it.

I teach Introduction to Cultural Anthropology to hundreds of students every year at Baruch College, a senior college of The City University of New York. Baruch has an incredibly diverse student body, with immigrants from more than a hundred countries, speaking dozens of languages and thinking about culture, race, gender, and family in as many different ways. Some of my students will become anthropology majors. More will become anthropology minors. But at Baruch, in fact, most students will become business majors.

This book emerges from my efforts to make anthropology relevant to all of my students as they navigate their everyday lives, think about the world as it is and as it is becoming, and consider tackling the crucial issues of our times. On a practical level, we all employ the skills of anthropology on a daily basis. Every time you walk into a room and try to figure out how to fit into a new group of people—in your classroom, in a student club, at the office, at a party, in your

religious community, when your new love interest takes you home to meet the family—how in the world do you deduce what the rules are? Where you fit in? What you're supposed to do? What the power dynamics are? What you can contribute to the group? *Essentials of Cultural Anthropology: A Toolkit for a Global Age* is designed to help you develop those skills—to think more deeply and analyze more carefully—and to prepare you to use them in a diversity of settings at home or around the world.

## WHY A NEW TEXTBOOK?

The world has changed dramatically in the past forty years and so has the field of anthropology. *Essentials of Cultural Anthropology: A Toolkit for a Global Age*—like the parent version, *Cultural Anthropology*—presents the theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical innovations that are transforming anthropology and highlights both historical and contemporary research that can provide students with insight into the ways in which anthropologists approach the crucial challenges and questions of our times. *Essentials* contains 14 concise chapters that I hope will easily fit into most courses—either as a stand-alone text or paired with additional primary readings and assignments. My goal with *Essentials* is to place at students' fingertips a lively, compelling presentation of the key concepts and debates at the heart of anthropology today in a shorter text—written without boxes and special features—that allows faculty increased flexibility in course development and design.

**Globalization.** As the world is changing, so too are the people anthropologists study. Even the way anthropologists conduct research is changing. In the contemporary period of rapid globalization, the movement, connection, and interrelatedness that have always been a part of human reality have intensified and become more explicit, reminding us that our actions have consequences for the whole world, not just for our own lives and those of our families and friends. This book integrates globalization into every chapter, analyzing its effects throughout the text rather than in a series of boxes, icons, or the occasional extra chapter so commonly seen in contemporary textbooks. The introductory chapter, “Anthropology in a Global Age,” establishes an analytical framework of globalization that is developed in every succeeding chapter—whether the topic is fieldwork, language, ethnicity, economics, or kinship—and gives students the tools to understand its impact on people's lives as they encounter them in ethnographic examples throughout the book.

**Reframing the Culture Concept.** The concept of culture has been central to anthropological analysis since the beginning of our field. But anthropologists have significantly reframed our thinking about culture over the past forty years. In the 1960s, Clifford Geertz synthesized anthropological thinking

about culture as a system of meaning—shared norms, values, symbols, and categories. In the ensuing years, anthropologists have paid increasing attention to the relationship of power to culture, building on the work of Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault, and Eric Wolf to examine the ways cultural meanings are created, learned, taught, enforced, negotiated, and contested. *Essentials of Cultural Anthropology: A Toolkit for a Global Age* integrates this holistic and complex concept of culture into every chapter, exploring both meaning and power in human culture. Chapter 5, for example, is titled “Race and Racism,” acknowledging that not only is race a social construction of ideas but also that ideas of race can be expressed and made real through cultural processes, institutions, and systems of power—racism—in ways that create patterns of stratification and inequality in U.S. culture and in cultures around the world.

**Anthropology for the Twenty-First Century.** *Essentials of Cultural Anthropology: A Toolkit for a Global Age* reflects the field of anthropology as it is developing in the twenty-first century. While carefully covering the foundational work of early anthropologists, every chapter has been designed to introduce the cutting-edge research and theory that make anthropology relevant to today’s world. Chapters on classic anthropological topics such as language, religion, and kinship incorporate contemporary research and help students understand why anthropological thinking matters in day-to-day life. Chapters on sexuality, the global economy, class and inequality, and health and illness give students a sense of historical and contemporary research in the field and bring the presentation of anthropology fully into the twenty-first century.

**Ethnography.** Anthropologists conduct fascinating research about the lives of people all over the world. In many ways ethnography is at the heart of anthropology, reflecting our unique research strategies, our analytical methodologies, and our deep commitment to the project of cross-cultural understanding and engagement in our attempts to make the world a better place. But ethnographies often get lost in introductory textbooks. *Essentials of Cultural Anthropology: A Toolkit for a Global Age* introduces scores of ethnographic studies set in dozens of different countries, presenting both new research and classic studies in ways that are accessible to undergraduates so that the rich work of anthropologists comes alive over the course of the semester.

**Relevance.** *Essentials of Cultural Anthropology* responds to my students’ request for relevance in a textbook. Each chapter opens with a recent event that raises central questions about the workings of human culture. Key questions throughout the chapter guide students through an introduction to the anthropological strategies and analytical frameworks that can enable them to think more deeply about the chapter-opening event and the underlying issues they may confront in their



own lives. “Thinking Like an Anthropologist” sections wrap up each chapter and challenge students to apply what they have learned.

## Additional Resources

Learn more at [wwnorton.com/instructors](http://wwnorton.com/instructors)

### **CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY FIELDWORK JOURNAL**

Ethnographic fieldwork is one of the most fundamental (and for students sometimes daunting) tools for anthropological study. Ken Guest’s *Cultural Anthropology Fieldwork Journal* provides 17 step-by-step exercises to help students apply the concepts they are learning in class while out in the real world. Designed to complement *Essentials of Cultural Anthropology: A Toolkit for a Global Age*, every activity in the *Fieldwork Journal* enhances students’ understanding of the concepts covered in the parent textbook. Compact and easy to use, the *Fieldwork Journal* includes space to write notes and record data.

The media package for *Essentials of Cultural Anthropology: A Toolkit for a Global Age* provides additional pedagogical tools that inspire students to *do* anthropology and apply it to their own lives. Instructors have everything they need to make traditional and online classes easier to manage: a DVD of clips that will enliven lectures and spark discussion; illustrated PowerPoints that include instructor-view lecture notes; and a fully customizable coursepack for Blackboard and other course-management systems.

### **EBOOK**

Available at [nortonebooks.com](http://nortonebooks.com)

*Essentials of Cultural Anthropology* is also available as an ebook. An affordable and convenient alternative, the ebook retains the content of the print book and allows students to highlight and take notes with ease.

### **POWERPOINTS**

David Anderson, Radford University/Roanoke College

Downloadable from [wwnorton.com/instructors](http://wwnorton.com/instructors) and perfect for classroom presentation, these resources include:

- **Lecture PowerPoints:** Illustrated with images from the text, these lecture PowerPoint slides feature a suggested classroom lecture outline in the notes field that will be particularly helpful to first-time teachers.
- **Art PowerPoints and JPEGs:** All of the art from the book and from the coursepack is sized for classroom display.

## **INSTRUCTOR DVD**

### **Russell Sharman**

The Instructor DVD features documentary and ethnographic film clips for initiating classroom discussion and showing students how anthropology is relevant to their lives. Filmmaker and anthropologist Russell Sharman has selected clips that are both engaging and pedagogically useful. The clips are also offered in streaming versions in the coursepack. Each streamed clip is accompanied by a quiz, exercise, or activity.

## **COURSEPACK**

### **David Anderson, Radford University/Roanoke College; Chad T. Morris, Roanoke College; and David Houston, University of Vermont**

*Essentials of Cultural Anthropology's* coursepack offers assessment and review materials for instructors who use Blackboard, Moodle, Canvas, and other learning-management systems. In addition to chapter-based assignments, test banks and quizzes, and an optional ebook, the coursepack includes interactive learning tools that will enliven hybrid, online, or traditional classrooms. Features include:

- Review and key-term quizzes for each chapter
- A variety of question types, including ranking and matching questions
- “Thinking Like an Anthropologist” and “Your Turn: Fieldwork” exercises and activities
- Streaming film clips from the Instructor DVD, each supported by a quiz or exercise
- The test bank

## **TEST BANK**

### **Jennifer Cardinal, University of New Mexico; Andrew Carey, University of New Mexico; Shirley Heying, University of New Mexico; Jayne Howell, California State University, Long Beach; Michelle Raisor, Blinn College; Nicholas Rattray, Butler University; David Houston, University of Vermont**

The test bank for *Essentials of Cultural Anthropology* is designed to help instructors prepare exams. Devised according to Bloom's taxonomy, the test bank includes 50–60 multiple-choice questions per chapter. In addition to Bloom's, each question is tagged with metadata that place it in the context of the chapter, as well as difficulty level, making it easy to construct tests that are meaningful and diagnostic.

## **INTERACTIVE INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE**

The Interactive Instructor's Guide makes lecture development easy with an array of teaching resources that can be searched and browsed according to a number of

criteria. Resources include chapter outlines and summaries; lecture ideas; discussion questions, recommended readings, videos, and websites; video exercises with streaming video; and activities with downloadable handouts. Instructors can subscribe to a mailing list to be notified of periodic updates and new content.

## Acknowledgments

Writing a book of this scope is a humbling experience. I have been awed by the remarkable work of the anthropologists I have encountered, whether through written texts, films, or one-on-one conversations. And I have been inspired by the commitment of my fellow anthropologists to deep understanding of people and cultures, to the search for insights into how the world really works, and to engagement with the world and its people in ways that may help make the world a better place. I have learned a great deal, personally and professionally, on this journey. Along the way it has been my privilege to have the support and encouragement of a remarkable array of people.

First, I would like to thank those colleagues whose invaluable feedback at many stages of the revision process led to the creation of this book. I have adopted many of the recommendations that they made.

**Kathleen Adams**, Loyola University  
Chicago

**Sabrina Adleman**, Lansing Community  
College

**Mark Allen**, California State Polytechnic  
University, Pomona

**Peter Allen**, Rhode Island College

**Myrdene Anderson**, Purdue University

**Tracy J. Andrews**, Central Washington  
University

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College

**James D. Armstrong**, College at  
Plattsburgh, State University of New York

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University

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University

**Bridget Balint**, Indiana University

**Diane Baxter**, University of Oregon

**AnnMarie Beasley**, Cosumnes River  
College

**O. Hugo Benavides**, Fordham University

**David Beriss**, University of New Orleans

**Ethan Bertrando**, Cuesta College

**Brad Biglow**, Florida State College at  
Jacksonville

**Krista Billingsley**, University of Tennessee

**Maggie Bodemer**, California Polytechnic  
State University

**Deborah A. Boehm**, University of Nevada,  
Reno

**Laurian Bowles**, Davidson College

**Angela Bratton**, Georgia Regents  
University

**Elise Brenner**, Bridgewater State  
University

**Mary Jill Brody**, Louisiana State University

**Boyd Brown III**, Nichols College

**Susan Brownell**, University of Missouri,  
St. Louis

**Ronda Brulotte**, University of  
New Mexico

**Jan Brunson**, University of Hawai'i at  
Manoa

**Kathleen Bubinas**, University of Wisconsin  
– Waukesha

**Liam Buckley**, James Madison University

**Anne Buddenhagen**, John Jay College of Criminal Justice  
**Jennie Burnet**, University of Louisville  
**Noah Butler**, Loyola University Chicago  
**Maria Leonor Cadena**, Fullerton College  
**Walter Calgano**, Prairie State College  
**Jennifer Chase**, University of North Texas  
**Kristen Check**, University of South Carolina  
**Aldo Civico**, Rutgers University  
**Paula Clarke**, Columbia College  
**Kimberley Coles**, University of Redlands  
**Elizabeth E. Cooper**, University of Alabama  
**Mark Cozin**, Raritan Valley Community College  
**Mary Lou Curran**, Mount Wachusett Community College  
**Joanna Davidson**, Boston University  
**Christina Davis**, Western Illinois University  
**Dona Davis**, University of South Dakota  
**Allan Dawson**, Drew University  
**Jeanne de Grasse**, Butler Community College  
**Jeffrey Debies-Carl**, University of New Haven  
**Teresa Delfin**, Whittier College  
**Rene M. Descartes**, State University of New York at Cobleskill  
**Rosemary Diaz**, Southern Connecticut State University  
**William Doonan**, Sacramento City College  
**Haley Duschinski**, Ohio University  
**Paulla Ebron**, Stanford University  
**Terilee Edwards-Hewitt**, Montgomery College  
**Kenneth Ehrensall**, Kutztown University  
**Tracy Evans**, Fullerton College  
**Jason Fancher**, Mt. Hood Community College  
**Derick Fay**, University of California, Riverside  
**Rick Feinberg**, Kent State University  
**Doug Feldman**, The College at Brockport, State University of New York

**Elena Filios**, Charter Oak State College  
**Mike Folan**, New Hampshire Technical Institute  
**Allison Foley**, Indiana University, South Bend  
**Ben Ford**, Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
**Todd French**, Depauw University  
**John Fritz**, Salt Lake Community College  
**Cynthia Gabriel**, Eastern Michigan University  
**Sue-Je Gage**, Ithaca College  
**Ismael García Colón**, College of Staten Island  
**Carlos Garcia-Quijano**, University of Rhode Island  
**Peter M. Gardner**, University of Missouri  
**Laura Gonzalez**, San Diego Miramar College  
**Julie Goodman**, California Baptist University  
**Henri Gooren**, Oakland University  
**Mark Gordon**, Pasadena City College  
**Thomas Gordon**, Monroe College  
**Alexis Gray**, Norco College  
**Peter B. Gray**, University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
**Thomas Gregor**, Vanderbilt University  
**Joyce D. Hammond**, Western Washington University  
**Melissa D. Hargrove**, University of North Florida  
**Adam Harr**, St. Lawrence University  
**Tina Harris**, University of Amsterdam  
**Kimberly Hart**, Buffalo State, State University of New York  
**Gary Heidinger**, Roane State Community College  
**Deanna Heikkinen**, Los Angeles Valley College  
**Nicole Hess**, Washington State University, Vancouver  
**Jude Higgins**, Salt Lake Community College  
**Servando Z. Hinojosa**, University of Texas – Pan American

**Dorothy L. Hodgson**, Rutgers University  
**David Hoffman**, Mississippi State University  
**Derek Honeyman**, University of Arizona  
**Sherman Horn**, Tulane University  
**Kendall House**, Boise State University  
**Brian Howell**, Wheaton College  
**Jayne Howell**, California State University, Long Beach  
**Arianne Ishaya**, De Anza College  
**Alice James**, Shippensburg University  
**Paul James**, Western Washington University  
**Alana Jolley**, Saddleback College  
**Carla Jones**, University of Colorado  
**Barbara Jones**, Brookdale Community College  
**Jessica Jones-Coggins**, Madison Area Technical College  
**Hannah Jopling**, Fordham University  
**Ingrid Jordt**, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee  
**Karen Kapusta-Pofahl**, Washburn University  
**Peta Katz**, University of North Carolina at Charlotte  
**Neal B. Keating**, College at Brockport, State University of New York  
**Grace Keyes**, St. Mary's University  
**Melissa King**, San Bernardino Valley College  
**Alice Kingsnorth**, American River College  
**Ashley Kistler**, Rollins College  
**Christine Kitchin**, Ocean County College  
**Chhaya Kolavalli**, University of Kentucky  
**Kathryn Kozaitis**, Georgia State University  
**Kathy Koziol**, University of Arkansas  
**Ruth Laird**, Mission College  
**Gabriel Lataianu**, Bergen Community College  
**Ida Leggett**, Middle Tennessee State University  
**Elinor Levy**, Raritan Valley Community College  
**Pierre Liénard**, University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
**Pamela Lindell**, Sacramento City College  
**David M. Lipset**, University of Minnesota  
**Chris Loeffler**, Irvine Valley College  
**Aurolyn Luykx**, University of Texas at El Paso  
**Pamela Maack**, San Jacinto College  
**Yvette Madison**, Pennsylvania Highlands Community College  
**Valentina Martinez**, Florida Atlantic University  
**Scott Matter**, University of Vermont  
**Michael Mauer**, College of the Canyons  
**Kathryn Maurer**, Foothill College  
**Siobhan McCollum**, Buffalo State, State University of New York  
**Jack McCoy**, Monmouth University  
**Reece McGee**, Texas State University  
**Bettie Kay McGowan**, Eastern Michigan University  
**Karletty Medina**, Northern Essex Community College  
**Arion Melidonis**, Oxnard College  
**Seth Messenger**, University of Maryland, Baltimore County  
**Jim Mielke**, University of Kansas  
**Ryan Moore**, Florida Atlantic University  
**Scotty Moore**, Houston Community College  
**Juliet Morrow**, Arkansas State University  
**Joylin Namie**, Utah Valley University  
**Chris Nelson**, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
**Neil Nevins**, New Hampshire Technical Institute  
**Rachel Newcomb**, Rollins College  
**Evelyn Newman Phillips**, Central Connecticut State University  
**Carol Nickolai**, Community College of Philadelphia  
**Jeremy Nienow**, Inver Hills Community College  
**Jennifer Oksenhorn**, Suffolk County Community College

**Michael O'Neal**, St. Louis Community College

**Erik Ozolins**, Mount San Jacinto College

**Liana Padilla-Wilson**, Los Medanos College

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**Craig Palmer**, University of Missouri

**Amanda Paskey**, Cosumnes River College

**Phyllis Passariello**, Centre College

**Crystal Patil**, University of Illinois at Chicago

**Mike Pavlik**, Joliet Junior College

**Linda Pelon**, McLennan Community College

**Ramona Pérez**, San Diego State University

**Dana Pertermann**, Blinn College

**Holly Peters-Golden**, University of Michigan

**Wayne Politsch**, Lewis and Clark Community College

**Lin Poyer**, University of Wyoming

**Marla Prochnow**, College of the Sequoias

**Erica Prussing**, University of Iowa

**Sharon Rachele**, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

**Michelle Raisor**, Blinn College

**Amanda Reinke**, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

**Daniel Robinson**, University of Florida

**Monica Rothschild-Boros**, Orange Coast College

**Frances Rothstein**, Montclair State University

**Stephanie Sadre-Orafai**, University of Cincinnati

**Kristin Safi**, Washington State University

**Maureen Salsitz**, Cypress College

**Bruce Sanchez**, Lane Community College

**Keri Sansevere**, Monmouth University

**Antonia Santangelo**, York College, City University of New York

**Richard Sattler**, University of Montana

**Jennifer Schlegel**, Kutztown University

**Scott Schnell**, University of Iowa

**Kathy Seibold**, The College of Idaho

**Frank Shih**, Suffolk County Community College

**Gregory Simon**, Pierce College

**Suzanne Simon**, University of North Florida

**Michael Simonton**, University of Cincinnati

**Nancy Smith**, South Plains College

**Sarah Smith**, Delta College

**Brian Spooner**, University of Pennsylvania

**Chelsea Starr**, University of Phoenix

**Erin Stiles**, University of Nevada, Reno

**Karen Stocker**, California State University, Fullerton

**Michelle Stokely**, Indiana University Northwest

**Richard Stuart**, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

**Circe Sturm**, University of Texas at Austin

**Noelle Sullivan**, Northwestern University

**Patricia Taber**, Ventura College

**Orit Tamir**, New Mexico Highlands University

**Arthur Tolley**, Indiana University East

**Patricia Tovar**, John Jay College of Criminal Justice

**Mark Tracy**, Minneapolis Community and Technical College

**Monica Udvardy**, University of Kentucky

**Lisa Valkenier**, Merritt College

**Jay VanderVeen**, Indiana University South Bend

**Katherine Wahlberg**, Florida Gulf Coast University

**Salena Wakim**, Mount San Jacinto College

**Renee Walker**, State University of New York at Oneonta

**Deana Weibel**, Grand Valley State University

**Nicole Weigel**, State University of New York College at Oneonta

**Margaret Weinberger**, Bowling Green State University

**Jill Wenrick**, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

**Max White**, Piedmont College

**Cassandra White**, Georgia State University

**Jennifer Wies**, Eastern Kentucky University

**Rebecca Wiewel**, University of Arkansas, Fort Smith

**Laura Wilhelm**, University of Nevada, Reno

**Benjamin Wilreker**, College of Southern Nevada

**Scott Wilson**, California State University, Long Beach

**Paul C. Winther**, Eastern Kentucky University

**Katrina Worley**, American River College

**Anibal Yáñez-Chávez**, California State University, San Marcos

**Laura Zeeman**, Red Rocks Community College

I would also like to thank the editors and staff at W. W. Norton who took a chance on this project to rethink the way anthropology is learned and taught. Julia Reidhead years ago encouraged me to keep my lecture notes in case I might write a textbook someday. Peter Lesser, my first editor, embraced the vision of the original book, signed me, brought me into the Norton fold and, with assistant editor Samantha Held, has guided the creation of *Essentials*. Karl Bakeman advised me throughout the writing and production of the Full book, and has been integral to its continued success among my colleagues and students. Alice Vigliani has been an excellent copyeditor. Ted Szczepanski, Trish Marx, and the Norton photo research department have worked hard to find engaging and beautiful illustrations. Linda Feldman and Ashley Horna handled every part of the manuscript and managed to keep the many pieces of the book moving through production. Norton's cultural anthropology marketing and sales team, Julia Hall, Natasha Zabohonski, Julie Sindel, Jonathan Mason, and Roy McClymont have advocated for the book with enthusiasm and boundless energy. Eileen Connell, Ava Bramson, and Alice Garrard put together all of the media resources that accompany the textbook. When it comes to creating new digital resources to help anthropologists teach in the classroom or teach online, I couldn't ask for a better team of people. Thanks to you all.

Heartfelt thanks to my many colleagues who have helped me think more deeply about anthropology, including members of the Sociology and Anthropology Department at Baruch College, especially Glenn Petersen, Robin Root, Carla Bellamy, Barbara Katz-Rothman, Angie Beeman, Myrna Chase, and Shelley Watson, as well as Jane Schneider, Louise Lennihan, Ida Susser, Peter Kwong, Michael Blim, Jonathan Shannon, Christa Salamandra, Russell Sharman, Dana Davis, Jeff Maskovsky, Rudi Gaudio, Charlene Floyd, and Zoë Sheehan Saldana. Members of the New York Academy of Sciences Anthropology Section helped me think more deeply about the relationship of culture and power. Leslie Aiello and the staff of the Wenner-Gren Foundation provided a vibrant venue to engage the cutting edges of anthropological research. The board of the American Ethnological Society allowed me to explore the

theme of anthropologists engaging the world through their spring 2012 conference. My research assistants Alessandro Angelini, Andrew Hernann, Chris Grove, Suzanna Goldblatt, Lynn Horridge, and Chris Baum continually introduced me to the richness of contemporary scholarship and creative strategies for teaching and learning. Thanks also to a wonderful group of friends and family who have supported and encouraged me during this fascinating and challenging journey: K and Charlene, Douglas, Marybeth, Julia, Asher, Dayna, Zoë, Sally and Steve, Marty and Linda, the guys at the Metro Diner—Nick, Marco, and Antonio—the SPSA community, the Ajax soccer family, Shari, Vicki, Frances Helen, and Thomas Luke.

Finally, I would like to thank my students at Baruch College who every class ask to be introduced to an anthropology that is relevant to their daily lives, that tackles significant contemporary issues, and that provides them the tools of analysis and empowerment to live awake, conscious, and engaged. This book is dedicated to you and your potential to make the world a better place.

Perhaps the quintessential human task is to pass to the next generation the accumulated insights, understandings, and knowledge that will empower them to live life fully and meaningfully and to meet the challenges confronting humanity and the planet. I hope this book might contribute to that existential endeavor.





# **Essentials of Cultural Anthropology**

# Part 1

Anthropologists in the twenty-first century engage a world that is experiencing an unprecedented interaction of people, ideas, images, and things that continues to intensify. Communication technologies link people instantaneously across the globe. Economic activities challenge national boundaries. People are on the move between countries and within them. Here, young Afghan women work at the first women-only Internet café in Kabul, 2012. How can *you* use the tools of anthropology to engage this world on the move?



# Anthropology for the 21st Century





Coca Cola

Go Back  
Go Back  
NAPM

# Chapter 1

## Anthropology in a Global Age

Every morning the women of Plachimada, a rural area in southern India, begin a five-kilometer (three-mile) trek in search of fresh water. The morning journey for water is a common task for many women across the world, for one-third of the planet's population lives with water scarcity. But such scarcity is new for the people of Plachimada, an area of typically rich agricultural harvests.

Local residents trace the changes to March 2000, when the Coca-Cola Company opened a bottling plant in the village. The plant is capable of producing 1.2 million bottles of Coke, Sprite, and Fanta every day. Nine liters of fresh water are needed to make one liter of Coke, so Plachimada's large underground aquifer was an attractive resource for the company. But according to local officials, when the company began to drill more wells and install high-powered pumps to extract groundwater for the factory, the local water table fell dramatically—from

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Indian village women protest the Coca-Cola Company's exploitation of underground water supplies.

45 meters (147.5 feet) below the surface to 150 meters (492 feet), far more than could be explained by periods of limited rainfall. Hundreds of local non-Coca-Cola wells ran dry, and harvests became much less productive. Local residents also claimed that Coca-Cola workers were dumping chemical wastes on land near the factory and that the runoff was polluting the groundwater. Local women organized protests and a sit-in at the factory gates.

With the assistance of local media and international human rights networks, the protestors' activism drew national and international attention. It even spurred solidarity actions, including support from university students in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Norway. As a result, the local village council withdrew the Coca-Cola factory's license. But the state government maintained its support. The case finally reached the highest state court, which ruled that Coca-Cola must cease illegal extraction of groundwater in Plachimada (Shiva 2006; Aiyer 2007).

For those of us who often enjoy a Coke with lunch or dinner—or breakfast—the story of the women of Plachimada offers a challenge to consider how our lives connect to theirs. It is a challenge to explore how a simple soft drink, made by a U.S. corporation with global operations, may link people halfway around the world in ways both simple and profound. This is also the challenge of anthropology today: to understand the rich diversity of human life and to see how our particular life experiences connect to those of others. By bringing these perspectives together, we can grasp more fully the totality and potential of human life.

At the same time, the world is changing before our eyes. Whether we call it a global village or a world without borders, we in the twenty-first century are experiencing a level of interaction among people, ideas, and systems that is intensifying at a breathtaking pace. Communication technologies link people instantaneously across the globe. Economic activities challenge national boundaries. People are on the move within countries and among them. Violence and terrorism disrupt lives. Humans have had remarkable success at feeding a growing world population, yet income inequality continues to increase—among nations and also within them. And increasing human diversity on our doorstep opens possibilities, both for deeper understanding and for greater misunderstanding. Clearly, the human community in the twenty-first century is being drawn further into a global web of interaction.

For today's college student, every day can be a cross-cultural experience. This may manifest itself in the most familiar places: the news you see on television, the music you listen to, the foods and beverages you consume, the women or men you date, the classmates you study with, the religious communities you attend. Today you can realistically imagine contacting any of our 7.2 billion co-inhabitants



MAP 1.1  
Plachimada



In the twenty-first century, people are experiencing unprecedented levels of interaction, encounter, movement, and exchange. Here, passengers board an overcrowded train in Dhaka, Bangladesh, returning home to celebrate the Muslim holy day of Eid al-Fitr.

on the planet. You can read their posts on Facebook and watch their videos on YouTube. You can visit them. You wear clothes that they make. You make movies that they view. You can learn from them. You can affect their lives. How do you meet this challenge of deepening interaction and interdependence?

Anthropology provides a unique set of tools, including strategies and perspectives, for understanding our rapidly changing, globalizing world. Most of you are already budding cultural anthropologists without realizing it. Wherever you may live or go to school, you are probably experiencing a deepening encounter with the world's diversity. This phenomenon leads to broad questions such as, How do we approach human diversity in our universities, businesses, families, and religious communities? How do we understand the impact of global transformations on our lives?

Whether our field is business or education, medicine or politics, we all need a skill set for analyzing and engaging a multicultural and increasingly interconnected world and workplace. *Cultural Anthropology: A Toolkit for a Global Age* introduces the anthropologist's tools of the trade to help you to better understand and engage the world as you move through it, and if you so choose, to apply those strategies to the challenges confronting us and our neighbors around the world. To begin our exploration of anthropology, we'll consider four key questions:

- **What is anthropology?**
- **Through what lenses do anthropologists gain a comprehensive view of human cultures?**
- **What is globalization, and why is it important for anthropology?**
- **How is globalization transforming anthropology?**



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# What Is Anthropology?

## anthropology

The study of the full scope of human diversity, past and present, and the application of that knowledge to help people of different backgrounds better understand one another.

**Anthropology** is the study of the full scope of human diversity and the application of that knowledge to help people of different backgrounds better understand one another. The word *anthropology* derives from the Greek words *anthropos* (“human”) and *logos* (“thought,” “reason,” or “study”). The roots of anthropology lie in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as Europeans’ economic and colonial expansion increased that continent’s contact with people worldwide.

## BRIEF BACKGROUND

Technological breakthroughs in transportation and communication during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—shipbuilding, the steam engine, railroads, the telegraph—rapidly transformed the long-distance movement of people, goods, and information, in terms of both speed and quantity. As colonization, communication, trade, and travel expanded, groups of merchants, missionaries, and government officials traveled the world and returned to Europe with reports and artifacts of what seemed to them to be “exotic” people and practices. More than ever before, Europeans encountered the incredible diversity of human cultures and appearances. *Who are these people?* they asked themselves. *Where did they come from? Why do they appear so different from us?*

From the field’s inception in the mid-1800s, anthropologists have conducted research to answer specific questions confronting humanity. And they have applied their knowledge and insights to practical problems facing the world.

Franz Boas (1858–1942), one of the founders of American anthropology, became deeply involved in early twentieth-century debates on immigration, serving for a term on a presidential commission examining U.S. immigration policies. In an era when many scholars and government officials considered the different people of Europe to be of distinct biological races, U.S. immigration policies privileged immigrants from northern and western Europe over those from southern and eastern Europe. Boas worked to undermine these racialized views of immigrants. He conducted studies that showed the wide variation of physical forms within groups of the same national origin, as well as the marked physical changes in the children and grandchildren of immigrants as they adapted to the environmental conditions in their new country (Baker 2004; Boas 1912).

Audrey Richards (1899–1984), studying the Bemba people in the 1930s in what is now Zambia, focused on issues of health and nutrition among women and children, bringing concerns for nutrition to the forefront of anthropology. Her ethnography, *Chisungu* (1956), featured a rigorous and detailed study of the coming-of-age rituals of young Bemba women and established new standards for the conduct of anthropological research. Richards’s research is often credited

with opening a pathway for the study of nutritional issues and women's and children's health in anthropology.

Today anthropologists apply their knowledge and research strategies to a wide range of social issues. For example, they study HIV/AIDS in Africa, immigrant farm workers in the United States, ethnic conflict in the former Yugoslavia, street children in Brazil, and Muslim judicial courts in Egypt. Anthropologists trace the spread of disease, promote economic development in underdeveloped countries, conduct market research, and lead diversity-training programs in schools, corporations, and community organizations. Anthropologists also study our human origins, excavating and analyzing the bones, artifacts, and DNA of our ancestors from millions of years ago to gain an understanding of who we are and where we've come from.

Sixty percent of anthropologists today work in *applied anthropology*—that is, they work outside of academic settings to apply the strategies and insights of anthropology directly to current world problems. Even many of us who work full time in a college or university are deeply involved in public applied anthropology.

## ANTHROPOLOGY'S UNIQUE APPROACH

Anthropology today retains its core commitment to understanding the richness of human diversity. Specifically, anthropology challenges us to move beyond **ethnocentrism**—the strong human tendency to believe that one's own culture or way of life is normal, natural, and superior to the beliefs and practices of others. Instead, as we will explore throughout this book, the anthropologist's toolkit of research strategies and analytical concepts enables us to appreciate, understand, and engage the diversity of human cultures in an increasingly global age. To that end, anthropology has built upon the key concerns of early generations to develop a set of characteristics unique among the social sciences.

### ethnocentrism

The belief that one's own culture or way of life is normal and natural; using one's own culture to evaluate and judge the practices and ideals of others.

**Anthropology Is Global in Scope.** Our work covers the whole world and is not constrained by geographic boundaries. Anthropology was once noted for the study of faraway, seemingly exotic villages in developing countries. But from the beginning, anthropologists have been studying not only in the islands of the South Pacific, in the rural villages of Africa, and among indigenous peoples in Australia and North America, but also (though to a lesser degree) among factory workers in Britain and France, among immigrants in New York, and in other communities in the industrializing world. Over the last thirty years, anthropology has turned significant attention to urban communities in industrialized nations. With the increase of studies in North America and Europe, it is fair to say that anthropologists now embrace the full scope of humanity—across geography and through time.