

BLOOMSBURG UNIVERSITY  
Bloomsburg Pennsylvania

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Department of Philosophy/Anthropology

Meet the New Faculty!: There are two new anthropology faculty members at Bloomsburg University for the Spring 1988 semester.

Dr. Flora Church is replacing Professor Reeder while he is on sabbatical for the spring semester. Dr. Church comes to us from Ohio State University where she completed her Ph.D. in March 1987. Her dissertation research is in archaeology, but she has interests in physical anthropology as well. Her dissertation focused on the transition from the Late Woodland to Late Prehistoric cultures in the Central Scioto Valley in Ohio, a time period which stretches from 500 AD to 1250 AD. She also has interests in the Lowland Maya and formative Mesoamerica. She has had an extensive background in classroom instruction at Ohio State and comes to us highly recommended by both her former students and her teaching colleagues.

Professor Kim Lanphear was hired to teach additional introductory sections in anthropology for the spring semester. Ms. Lanphear taught at the State University of New York at Albany and Skidmore College before joining us. She is completing her dissertation at SUNY-Albany, focusing on a paleopathological and demographic study of 300 skeletons excavated from a 19th century American poorhouse in Rochester, New York. Her major area of interest is in the prehistory and history of human disease. She has a background in both physical anthropology, primarily osteology, and archaeology. She also was highly recommended to us as a popular and effective instructor.

We hope that both Flora and Kim will have an enjoyable and productive semester at Bloomsburg.

Summer Field School in Archaeology: The anthropology program will be sponsoring its second summer field school in archeology from May 16 to July 1. The seven week field school will focus on research in Columbia County; the project will produce the first systematic survey of archaeological sites in this region. Students will receive instruction in archaeological survey and excavation, sampling strategies, mapping, recording techniques, analysis and interpretation. In addition to field experience, students will be given classroom presentations on the culture history of Pennsylvania, the natural history of the area, archaeological problem solving and hypothesis testing.

The Field School is offered as 46.301, Field Archaeology, for either 3 or 6 credits. Those interested in more information should contact Elise Brenner at 4334.

The Garbage Project: While most archaeologists have concentrated on the human past, one group of researchers at the University of Arizona has focused on the present by conducting a carefully controlled study of household wastes in Tucson. This work, which is under the supervision of William Rathje, is used to teach sampling techniques to archaeology students and to test the validity of assumptions made by archaeologists about human waste in historic and prehistoric sites. The work has also been used to test the validity of research techniques used by other social scientists. The research so far shows a significant difference between what people tell researchers and what they actually do. For instance, one study in Tucson in 1973, designed to learn the rate of alcohol consumption in the city, used a questionnaire to demonstrate that 15% of respondent households admitted consuming beer, and none admitted drinking more than 8 cans a week. Analysis of the garbage from the same area, however, showed that 80% of the households consumed beer, and 50% discarded more than 8 cans per week.

Another interesting finding of the project was that when beef prices hit an all-time high in 1973, so did the amount of beef wasted by Tucson households. The same relationship occurred in 1975 when sugar became scarce. If it could be true that people waste more in times of scarcity, this could lead to a reinterpretation of past human sites.

More recently, Rathje has challenged assumptions about contemporary garbage made by a commentator in the New York Times. In a letter to the Times on January 26, 1988, Rathje says the writer was mistaken when he assumed that styrofoam fast-food packaging was the major culprit in growing urban waste. Rathje reports that his research in Tucson (now expanded to include samples in Chicago and San Francisco) shows that styrofoam packaging accounts for only .27% of garbage by volume. This contrasts with the popular perception of the situation in which respondents report that fast-food packaging accounts for between 5 and 35%. By comparison, newspapers, which are easily recyclable, account for 14.11% of waste by volume. By comparison with fast-food packaging, disposable baby diapers represent a much larger problem, accounting for 1.01% of waste by volume. A proposed bill in the New York City Council to control fast-food wastes will, therefore, have little impact on urban waste problems.

Predictably, Rathje sums up his work as follows: "It was not a pleasant task, but someone had to do it."

Anthropology Club News: The Anthropology Club has reorganized for the spring semester with Denise Etris serving as president. The Club has a full slate of activities for the spring. On February 3, the Club is sponsoring a movie on apartheid, "South Africa Belongs to Us," in the Kehr Union Multipurpose Room C at 7:30 PM. On February 4, the Club is sponsoring a cross-cultural feast with the International Club at Faith Warner's house. On February 20, the Club will travel to Penn State University to view the Anthropology Museum there (see Elise Brenner for more details). On March 23rd, the Club will sponsor the movie, "Songs of the Fourth World," about the Hopi Indians in KUB Multipurpose Room C at 7:30. Finally, there are plans coming together for an overnight trip to Washington, D.C. on the 3rd or 4th weekend in March. If you are



This is a frustrating question to face since there is almost no literature in anthropology on mental retardation in other cultures. In fact, in an interesting reversal of the usual popular conception of anthropology, there is more written on mental retardation in the United States by anthropologists than for other cultures. In a survey of 20 introductory texts on cultural anthropology, Dave Minderhout discovered none that dealt with this topic. As a result, Dave decided to survey the anthropological literature using the Human Relations Area Files and available ethnographic literature to see what might be found.

In the literature available, Dave found 60 references to mental retardation in other cultures. In the majority of these cases, the mentally retarded were treated kindly, usually being kept within their families and given life-long care. Generally, the mentally retarded are not allowed to marry, hold property, or assume titles or positions of authority in their societies. Occasionally, the mentally retarded are viewed as a special gift from the gods. One South American Indian culture, the Guarani, say that the mentally retarded are created by god, conceived without sexual relations between the parents; these people are treated with special affection. Egyptian villagers refer to the mentally retarded as "saints", while Tibetans looked at them as a special reincarnation and tried to interpret their actions as having special meanings.

Occasionally, there are references in the anthropological literature to the mentally retarded being abused or ridiculed. A few cultures view mental retardation as a kind of demon possession, and one, the Saulteaux of North America, killed retarded persons to destroy the demon. Generally, however, the retarded are seen as presenting no special problems for their families and are treated well.

There are some interesting cases in the literature that are worth describing in greater detail. In six cases from Africa and Melanesia there were reports that the retarded were believed to be compulsive wanderers, going from house to house, doing odd jobs. These people generally stayed with relatives as they traveled and were treated with great care. From Cambodia comes an example where a retarded child was crowned the "King of Angkor" by his peers and was carried in a parade with great ceremony. Finally, the Tiv of West Africa had a custom whereby chiefs used mentally retarded persons as messengers, especially in cases where a person was being summoned to appear at court. The messenger would deliver a memorized summons, and the person being summoned was forced to appear without any knowledge of the state of mind of the chief or the circumstances of the summons, it being thought to be useless to question a retarded person.

Bog Man Interpreted: The January 26, 1988 issue of the New York Times contains an article about research conducted on the body of a man believed to be 2200 years old which was pulled from a peat bog near Manchester, England. Historic and prehistoric bodies are occasionally discovered in peat deposits in England, Ireland, and the Scandinavian countries. The chemical properties of the acidic peat dissolve the bones of people buried there, but they may preserve the flesh and other soft body tissue. Once unearthed, the bodies begin to decay rapidly,

but chemical techniques exist to halt the decay process. The body in question was of a young man, who had had his throat cut, his windpipe crushed, and his face held under water. Despite this, researchers decided on the basis on the facial expression and the condition of muscle tissue at death that the man went voluntarily to his death. Subsequent research has focused on interpreting what had happened.

Researchers believe that the man was not an ordinary citizen of the agricultural society to which he belonged. He seemed to be in good health at the time of his death, and he lacked calluses on his hands, suggesting that he had not been a laborer. The key to interpreting his death was his stomach contents, his last meal having been a scorched bannock cake. It is known from historic sources that Celtic culture used bannock bread in a ritual manner to select candidates by lot for special purposes. A griddle cake of bannock was prepared, with one edge being burned. The cake would then be broken into pieces, which were then placed in a bag. Candidates would draw pieces from the bag, and the one with the burned piece would be chosen. In this case, the selection appears to have been for ritual sacrifice. Certain Celtic gods were propitiated by human sacrifice, the manner of death indicating the god involved. The god Tarainis was traditionally honored by beheading or bludgeoning; the god Esus called for a cut throat; and Teutates was honored by drownings. The young man whose body was recovered was so highly thought of that he was offered in sacrifice to all three of these gods.