

BLOOMSBURG UNIVERSITY
Bloomsburg Pennsylvania

ANTHROPOLOGY NEWSLETTER
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Summer School 1993: The Department of Anthropology is offering the following courses for the 1993 summer sessions:

- 46.101 Introduction to Anthropology - Mr. Reeder - Session 1
- 46.102 Anthropology & World Problems - Dr. Minderhout - Session 3
- 46.200 Principles of Cultural Anthropology - Dr. Minderhout - Session 3
- 46.220 Human Origins - Mr. Reeder - Session 1

Though it is listed in the summer school bulletin, 46.210, Prehistoric Archaeology has been cancelled. All of the courses offered satisfy the general education requirements for the Group B distribution, and 46.102 additionally may be used to satisfy the Values, Ethics & Responsible Decision-making requirement.

Attention Anthropology Majors: Mr. Reeder has announced the following schedule of required upper level classes.

- Fall 1993 - 46.405 - Primates
- Spring 1994 - 46.470 - Anthropology Theory
- Fall 1994 - 46.405
- Spring 1995 - 46.470
- Fall 1995 - 46.405
- Spring 1996 - 46.470

Please schedule these courses before your last semester of graduation.

Privacy in American Life: People coming to the United States from other countries often have a hard time understanding the concept of privacy as Americans use it. To illustrate this point, we present this selection from a letter written by a Korean national living in the United States to a friend of his in Korea. This letter attempts to explain several aspects of American life to someone who is about to come here to live:

My first Greyhound bus trip in 1972 was a long one from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to Syracuse, New York. During this twenty-four hour trip, I met a divorced Catholic woman who confided in me the most intimate aspects of her private life, including her sexual hang-ups. By the time I got off the bus, she not only gave me her telephone number, but also demanded I call her daughter who was allegedly a student at Syracuse University. Two weeks after this incident, I rushed to Massachusetts to visit Michelle and Bob. You may remember these Americans whom I befriended at college in Korea; they had come to our university, in the midst of the Vietnam War, to do "peace" work instead of being involved in the acts of savagery in the Southeast Asian

rice paddies. Our friendship, conceived and nurtured in the homespun Korean cultural climate, was indeed a special one ... Our mutual respect and affection were such that Bob and I even showed unmanly tears at the airport when they returned to the states after three years. You can imagine, MK, how heartbroken I was when I arrived in that small New England city and was told they had been separated for several months. Their Korean-born son, Daniel, was on a biweekly parental-visit schedule. I had to ape Daniel's visiting schedule, seeing my old friends separately. On the second night I spent with Bob, he had a small dinner party for several of his friends, and I met an interesting woman with a radical political viewpoint. She was apparently a hard-core Maoist with a strong conviction that only a Mao-style revolution could solve America's mounting problems of the time. After dinner, she cordially invited me - me alone, that is - to her apartment, which was in the same building as Bob's. When I knocked on the door fifteen minutes later, I was greeted with a lifesize poster of Chairman Mao hanging on the living room wall... That gigantic red poster alone was sufficient to make my heart palpitate, but, my friend, it was nothing compared to what I was to discover next. On a more careful scrutiny of the woman with whom I found myself alone, I realized that she was in a see-through evening dress with nothing under it! Admittedly it was a hot summer evening, and even a most stoic Confucian disciple might have chosen relaxing attire. Even so, displaying the most private parts of her body to a virtual stranger completely threw me off. To be honest with you, I have no recollection of how coherent I was that night when I argued against the inhuman nature of Communist ideology, especially as it was practiced in the Chinese Communist Revolution, which claimed approximately eight million lives.

These two encounters - that is, the one with the babbling woman on the Greyhound bus and the other with the naked Maoist revolutionary - led me to believe, however temporarily, that in America a voluntary abandonment of one's privacy precedes a long-lasting personal friendship. In Korea, as I remember, MK, it was always a lengthy friendship that was used as a pretext to forego one's own privacy or violate that of another person.

Several days later, it was time to visit Michelle and her son. After spending a splendid New England summer afternoon on a beach where Michelle painfully explained how her separation from Bob came about, we headed home in her brand new Volvo. Out of curiosity and anxiety about my transportation problem in Syracuse, I asked Michelle, "How much did you pay for this car?"

"Michael, you do not ask a question like that in the States," said she, using my baptismal name.

"What do you mean?" I responded, perplexed.

"Because it is a matter of privacy. If you really need to know, 'Did you get a good deal for this car?' would be more appropriate," Michelle stated matter-of-factly.

As her voice or look did not indicate any sign that she was less than serious, I

repressed my urge to protest against her apparent contradiction. What about our six-year friendship, I thought, and all the intimate facts of private life involving the imminent divorce, which she just passed on to me at the beach? My perplexity and puzzlement were slow to diminish, since she never told me how much she paid for the car.

From: "American Graffiti: Curious Derivatives of Individualism," by Jin K. Kim. This article can be found in *DISTANT MIRRORS: AMERICA AS A FOREIGN CULTURE*, edited by Philip R. DeVita and James D. Armstrong (Wadsworth, Inc. 1993).

SSHE Undergraduate Anthropology Conference: A number of BU students attended and participated in the Fifth Annual SSHE Undergraduate Anthropology Research Conference at California University of Pennsylvania on March 27. Three presentations by BU students were on the program. A paper jointly presented by Rich Lewis and George Stout were joined on the program by papers by Shannon Leonard and Erica Libhart. Also attending were Bill Lowthert, Melissa Pertnoy, Jennifer Scales, and Richard White. (Dr. Aleto also had planned to attend, but unfortunately, his car broke down near the Lock Haven exit of I-80.) The students who attended were enthusiastic about the program, and they volunteered BU as the host of the sixth conference to be held next spring.

Translating Prehistoric Languages: In the March 19 issue of *SCIENCE*, anthropologists John S. Justeson and Terrence Kaufman report that they have been able to decipher the hieroglyphic writing system of the culture known as the epi-Olmec. This culture flourished in southern Mexico between 150 BC and 450 AD. The culture is called epi-Olmec because it follows the well-known Olmec culture (1200 BC-500 BC) in the same region. Epi-Olmec writing is known from symbols carved on stone monuments discovered in archaeological excavations. The authors' work make epi-Olmec the earliest Mesoamerican writing system to have been translated.

In making their translation, Justeson and Kaufman made the assumption that the language of the epi-Olmec people was related to the Mixe-Zoque languages spoken in that region of Mexico at the time of the Spanish conquest; members of this language group are still spoken in that area today. Work by historical linguists on the Mixe-Zoquean languages has yielded insights into what the languages ancestral to modern Mixe-Zoque must have been like, and Justeson and Kaufman were able to base their research on those historical reconstructions. They were also helped by the work of earlier researchers who had identified the signs for dates and numbers in epi-Olmec and by the similarities between epi-Olmec signs and ones used by later Mayan cultures.

As noted, the writing system of the epi-Olmecs was based on hieroglyphics (or logographs, as linguists call them). In a logographic system, each symbol is a stylized picture which stands for a concept (as opposed to an alphabet in which each symbol stands for a sound.) In epi-Olmec, the concept involved can be a word, as in the case of signs signifying numbers or days of the week, or a syllable. Epi-Olmec apparently combined signs representing different syllables into words; an example of a modern

language which does this is Japanese. Essentially, Justeson and Kaufman took all they already knew about epi-Olmec and Mayan writing (which uses the same kind of logographic writing) and combined that with assumptions about the grammar of historic Mixe-Zoquean languages to produce a translation. In this process, a knowledge of Mixe-Zoquean suggests something about word order. The researchers then looked for repetitive signs, made assumptions about their meaning, and looked to see if they made sense in a Mixe-Zoquean syntax.

As noted, the main sources for epi-Olmec writing are stone monuments, especially the La Mojarra Stela I (AD 159) and the Tuxtla Statuette (AD 162). The stela shows an epi-Olmec warrior-king. The hieroglyphics associated with the warrior-king describe at length his rise to power through several years of warfare and ritual activity. Justeson and Kaufman note that the stela text is unusual in that it emphasizes the role of the king's supporters in his ascension. The statuette may represent the spirit helper of one of those supporters, a shaman. The statuette is of a human being in the costume of an animal, with a duckbill mask and a cape of bird wings and claws. Originally thought to show a god, the statuette may represent a spiritual companion of the shaman who was called upon to aid in the rise to the throne. The statuette text describes a ritual which was performed on the sixth anniversary of the ruler's last recorded battle before taking power.

Justeson and Kaufman are anxious for more monuments to be uncovered through archaeological excavation so that they can expand their readings of epi-Olmec texts.

Society for American Archaeology: Bloomsburg University will be represented at the annual meeting of the Society for American Archaeology this year by Dr. Tom Aleto and students Faith Katherman, Erica Libhart, Bill Lowthert, and Dan Snyder. The meetings will be held in St. Louis from April 15 to 18.

New Evidence for Environmental Degradation in the Ancient Americas: by Dr. Tom Aleto. One of the goals of anthropology is to understand the cultures of the world, both in prehistory and in the present. In so doing, it hopes to inform the scholarly and lay communities about the true nature of these cultures and to overturn misconceptions about their ways of life. Unfortunately, anthropology itself sometimes is responsible for creating misunderstandings about culture that become deeply imbedded in the scholarly literature and the popular imagination.

One such misunderstanding concerns the relationship between the prehistoric peoples of the Americas and their natural environment. Since the 1960's, many anthropologists have held that native Americans had lived in harmony with their environment and have adopted strategies that conserved natural resources. This view emerged from several sources of information. Studies of tropical rain forest cultures throughout the Western Hemisphere seemed to indicate that, by living in small groups at low population densities and by practicing a form of shifting cultivation known as slash and burn agriculture, native peoples had been able to develop a sustainable system which provided adequately for the needs of society while preserving the

natural environment for future generations. Additionally, analysis of native religions and philosophies suggested that the aboriginal Americans viewed themselves as part of nature rather than apart from it. Since in this view humans were immersed in nature and human survival was based on the continuation of the natural world, many anthropologists argued that native Americans consciously organized their economic, social and political activities in such a way as to make a minimal impact on their physical surroundings.

On the basis of this kind of information, many anthropologists portrayed the ancient Americas as an unspoiled land in which people lived in harmony with their environment. In this view the degradation of this paradise could be attributed to the post-Columbian period when Westerners, with a Biblical view of the world (which challenged humans to dominate and transform nature) destroyed the native people, their philosophies and their conservationist ethic.

In recent years this idyllic view has been challenged by research which suggests that native Americans, like their prehistoric and historic counterparts in the Old World, had over-utilized their natural environment and found themselves face to face with ecological catastrophe. Much of this work, initiated in the late 1970's, focused on the Maya of southern Mexico and Guatemala. In an attempt to explain the collapse of Classic Maya civilization in approximately AD 900, archaeologists began to take sediment cores from lakes in the region. These cores provided records not only of the sedimentation rates in the lakes' drainage basins, but also samples of the pollen produced by plants in the area.

A general pattern emerged from the cores. In the period immediately preceding the abandonment of the cities, sedimentation rates increased dramatically. This suggested that the Maya, as they cleared larger areas of their territory in order to augment food production, were denuding hillsides. The pollen evidence supported this interpretation. As sedimentation rates grew, the pollen profiles changed from ones dominated by mature forest communities to ones dominated by pioneer species of weedy plants which colonize eroded, barren soil. On the basis of these data, archaeologists have suggested that the Classic Maya experienced a population explosion in the centuries preceding the collapse. In response, they abandoned their conservation system of shifting cultivation which had had a limited effect on the forest and adopted a more intensive system of agriculture unsuited for the fragile tropical soils that characterize their area. This, in turn, so transformed the natural environment that the Maya were unable to feed themselves and were forced to flee their cities and their civilized way of life.

A study of soil cores from Lake Patzcuaro in western Mexico, recently published in the British journal NATURE, indicates that the Maya were not the only native Americans overtaxing their environment and that degradation of natural resources was a more widespread and frequent phenomenon. Sara O'Hara and two colleagues demonstrate that the Lake Patzcuaro region underwent three distinct periods of soil erosion. The first of these, a minor event in comparison to the later two, occurred

between 1900-1250 BC. This corresponds to the period when agricultural subsistence and village life were first developing. This land-clearing episode probably represents the effects of the establishment of Neolithic society in Mexico. The second and more severe period of erosion dates to 600 BC to 600 AD, the time when the Teotihuacan empire - the largest prehistoric conquest state in ancient Mexico - expanded beyond the Basin of Mexico. It could reflect an increase in local population or the effects of tribute demands imposed by the Teotihuacanos to feed their own burgeoning population and to build their enormous city.

The most severe erosion took place between AD 1200-1600 when the Aztec empire expanded throughout Mexico. The Aztecs never conquered the Lake Patzcuaro region, which was controlled by the powerful Tarascan state. However, the Aztecs and the Tarascans fought to a military stand-off over a period of more than a century. The environmental degradation indicated by the third episode may reflect the natural population increase of the Tarascans coupled with the effects of sustained warfare. Clearing the landscape may have been necessary both to feed the besieged populations and to provide wood for protective battlements and military weaponry. Erosion rates reduce dramatically after the arrival of the Spanish when the forests recolonized the slopes. This is an ironic twist, considering the role Europeans traditionally have been thought to play in degrading the environment.

These data, when added to those for the Maya, suggest that the native American's exploitation of the natural environment was not so different from that of other prehistoric and modern people around the world. When confronted by population increase, taxation, warfare and other stresses, they were forced to use their environment in a way that led to long-term degradation. Under such circumstances, a conservationist philosophy and the knowledge of how to manage the environment under less demanding conditions apparently are not enough to prevent people from despoiling the world within which they live, especially when the short-term consequences - famine, starvation or surrender to an enemy - are unacceptable alternatives.

Unintended Consequences: The following excerpt is from *DO'S & TABOOS OF HOSTING INTERNATIONAL VISITORS* by Roger E. Axtell (John Wiley 1990):

You would think that one cultural common meeting place would be the dinner table, but as we have seen here some startling surprises can easily be served up along with the food. An anecdote that seems to typify this whole chapter was related to me by a woman from Rockford, Illinois. She and her family reside near a large community college there and often host foreign students as a way of helping them acclimatize. On one of these occasions, they invited a student from Iceland to stay at their home and while helping him unpack she noticed that he had a collection of forks, each pattern different from the other. "Do you mind me asking why you have all these forks?" she said. "Well, it's a curious thing," the student replied, "Whenever I am invited for dinner in an American home, when the hostess serves dinner and then clears the plates, she says to me 'Keep your fork.' So I do."

Congratulations!: to Dr. Dee Anne Wymer, who is cited in the April 1993 issue of the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC. The magazine contains a brief article about the mastodon research conducted by Dr. Wymer and her colleagues. To quote the article, "The intestines also contained the mastodon's last meal, according to Dee Anne Wymer of Bloomsburg University in Pennsylvania, an expert on ancient plants. Mastodons are known to have eaten spruce branches, but this one had devoured water lilies, pondweed, and swamp grasses. 'That's a very rich, nutritious diet,' Wymer says. 'This guy was focusing on yummy stuff.' "

Congratulations are also in order to two graduating seniors who are going on to graduate school. Erica Libhart has been offered admission and financial support at both the University of Illinois and the University of Pittsburgh, while Bill Lowthert has accepted admission and support from the University of Kentucky.

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Addenda: So much has happened in anthropology since the "last" newsletter of the semester was sent to Duplicating during the last week of March that the editor decided to put out an update. So think of this brief issue as number 6a or 6+ or whatever ...

Cross-Cultural Feast: On April 21, the Anthropology Club sponsored a cross-cultural feast in Multipurpose Room A of the new Kehr Union. Students prepared dishes from around the world and described/served them to their many guests. The feast was well-attended, with students and faculty members from several programs on campus participating. Congratulations are in order to club member Crystle Reustle who put in many long hours organizing the feast.

Congratulations!: to anthropology majors Doug Hibshman and Shannon Leonard who were recently inducted into the honor society, Phi Kappa Phi. Both will graduate Magna cum Laude in May. Dr. Tom Aleto was one of several faculty members inducted into the society as well.

Errata: In the last issue, we reported on those members of the anthropology program who participated in the Society for American Archaeology Meetings in St. Louis, April 15-18. We inadvertently left out the name of anthropology major, Regina Girton, who also attended. Sorry, Regina! Early returns report that the meetings were productive for all who participated.

And Other News: Dr. Dee Anne Wymer attended the meetings of the Pennsylvania Archaeological Council in East Stroudsburg on April 23 Dr. Dave Minderhout addressed the inductees of the National Honor Society at Bloomsburg High School on April 26.

HAVE A NICE SUMMER!