

The Participant Observer

Department of Anthropology
University of Rochester
Rochester, NY 14627

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Can It Really All Be Explained By Guns, Germs and Steel?

This year's Louis Henry Morgan Lecture, "As Natural As Life: What A Papua New Guinea Sugar Plantation Can Teach Us About Human History," was delivered by Dr. Frederick Errington and Dr. Deborah Gewertz. The lecture examined globalization and global disparities from the perspective of a Papua New Guinea sugar plantation owned and operated by a British-based multinational corporation. Dr. Errington, Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at Trinity College, and Dr. Gewertz, G. Henry Whitcomb Professor of Anthropology at Amherst College, gave a public lecture on Wednesday October 16th, and joined a panel discussion on the 17th, on various aspects of their historical and anthropological study of Papua New Guinea. Both Gewertz and Errington are considered premier ethnographers of Papua New Guinea, the largest of the Pacific island states.

Within their research in Papua New Guinea, particularly their research around the Ramu sugar plantation, Errington and Gewertz believe there lie important lessons about human history. It first and foremost teaches us that history is not a blind course of events. People have made history by conducting themselves within culture. Cultural narratives have changed as people interact and we must contemplate how they have changed. Booker Agriculture Inc., a British owned company, brought the Ramu sugar plantation itself to Papua New Guinea because Papua New Guineans wanted to "catch up" to the countries that surrounded them without making the same mistakes that other countries had made. They wanted to bring in capitalism and infrastructure in order to provide for national self-sufficiency. Ramu sugar did not just pop into the picture because it was an inevitability, but because it was a possibility and was part of Papua New Guinean's cultural narratives of desire.

The first question that might come to mind is, "How is Ramu not a tool for expansionism and Westernization?" Errington and Gewertz argue that Ramu favors protective markets. There is an emphasis on Papua New Guinean investors, jobs for Papua New Guinean residents, and a general sense of social positivism. They argue that Ramu is one of the brighter spots in Papua New Guinea; it has characteristics of "benign capitalism," which is for the local people and benefits them. The factory itself produces sugar but at the same time evokes a common heritage, since sugar cane was originally domesticated in Papua New Guinea, and allows them to get out from underneath their former colonizers, the Australians.

However, the lecture quickly began to focus not on Ramu sugar as a controversial industry in Papua New Guinea, but on a controversial book

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published in 1999 and written by biologist Jared Diamond. The book, Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fate of Human History, was written after Diamond had an experience in Papua New Guinea with a man named Yali. Yali asked the question, "Why do Black people have nothing of their own?" Diamond, in his book, uses this question to lead the reader into a discussion of the unfolding patterns of history's "haves" and "have-nots." His analysis relies on geography and the availability of guns, germs and steel to explain the presence of global disparities. However, as anthropologists, Errington and Gewertz disagree with Diamond's analysis. They believe that Yali was not asking about the "have" and "have-nots" of possessions and was instead questioning "Black people's" lack of social equality. What Diamond's analysis lacks is a discussion of how Papua New Guineans shape events in their own views of the desirable and the feasible. He misses what the "have-nots" of the world actually want. His history is a working out of ultimate causes that have shaped immediate effects as proximal causes. Unlike Errington and Gewertz, Diamond seems to believe that necessary causes are sufficient causes and culture is only a wildcard. Therefore, "Black people's" ancestors lacked access to resources and therefore lost the environmental draw and ended up the "have-nots."

Errington and Gewertz's biggest problem with Diamond is that his attitude of historical inevitability allows for the support of the status quo. His argument leaves the "haves" convinced they are just that, not because of active oppression but because of passive inevitability and therefore they are no longer responsible for their position as a "have." His argument does not take into account cultural narratives on the desirable and feasible. There are often, in Errington and Gewertz view, culturally salient alternatives. Diamond's ideas over historical inevitability did not come out of genuine conversation with Yali. Yali's question could have challenged the self-interested, but his voice was silenced by Diamond's attempts to justify conquest with the rhetoric of what was inevitable.



If Errington and Gewertz were to address Yali's question they would pay attention to the complexities of the rhetoric, practices and contingencies of empires. They would acknowledge the contesting narratives of how others could benefit us not through exploitation, but through self-consideration, and concern ourselves with what could bring equality to Yali and people like him. Part of the answer lies in the denaturalizing of power. The focus should be on how power could be used in other ways. As "haves" we must begin a movement towards the acknowledgement of responsibility regardless of the historical and cultural influences that might play a part in the way we attained that position. As anthropologists, when we take on cultural projects we must recognize how imbued with self-interest they can be and we must also take responsibility for that self-interest.

If you would like more information on Drs. Errington and Gewertz please feel free to visit our website at <http://www.rochester.edu/college/ANT/events.html>.

ALUMNI UPDATES:

Richard J. Senghas (PhD, 1997) has recently been awarded tenure at Sonoma State University, promoted to Associate Professor, and now serves as chair of the Department of Anthropology/Linguistics and as coordinator of the Linguistics Program at Sonoma State. His teaching duties at SSU focus on anthropological theory, linguistic anthropology, and linguistics. Richard conducted fieldwork on a newly emerging sign language in Managua, Nicaragua as part of his dissertation. He has recently published an article with Leila Monaghan, "Signs of Their Times: Deaf Communities and the Culture of Language," in this year's volume of the Annual Review of Anthropology, in which they review sign language research in the anthropological literature. He also has completed a chapter on his own work in Nicaragua that will appear in *Many Ways to be Deaf*, a collection expected for release by Gallaudet University Press in the Spring of 2003. Bringing his anthropological perspective back home (quite literally), he began ethnographic studies of cohousing as a mode of housing and intentional community formation in the U.S. His interests are motivated in part by his own experiences with cohousing in Rochester, NY, and Sonoma County, CA. He can be reached by e-mail at Richard.Senghas@sonoma.edu.

FACULTY UPDATES:

Eastman professor of ethno-musicology **Ellen Koskoff** received the esteemed 2002 ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award for her recent book "Music in Lubavitcher Life." The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers, rewards the Deems Taylor Award annually for exceptional writing and scholarship pertaining to music.

Professor Koskoff will be teaching "Worlds of Music," a cross-listed anthropology course in the spring semester of this year.

Professor **Robert J. Foster** is releasing a new book, *Materializing the Nation: Commodities, Consumption, and Media in Papua New Guinea*. The book is being published by Indiana University Press.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Riverside is seeking enthusiastic, qualified applicants for its graduate program. The program transforms scholars into professional anthropologists who will variously engage in research, teaching, policy-related, and/or administrative activities that benefit the peoples with whom they work. It focuses on how people living in a variety of settings participate in and adapt to processes of change and transformation, both historically and in the contemporary world. The faculty is committed to a unified concept of the discipline and views the traditional subfields (sociocultural, archaeological, linguistic, and biological) as crosscut by a series of foci that create clusters of faculty from the traditional subject interests and constitute areas of specialization. These foci articulate contemporary or emerging concerns within the discipline. They constitute both the strength and uniqueness of the program. The most developed foci at present are concerned with (1) transnational processes such as inequality, migration, border and bi-national communities that are associated with the globalization of capital today; (2) the archaeology of Mesoamerica and Western North America; and (3) political ecology and economy; (4) applied anthropology; (5) medical anthropology; and (6) local knowledge systems. A majority of the faculty has conducted research in Latin America, so there is depth in this area.

The department admits applicants only during the fall quarter. The deadline for admissions to the fall quarter is January 5. Only complete applications will be considered. Applicants will be notified in late March. For further information, please contact the Graduate Advisor or Students Affairs Assistant at the Department of Anthropology, University of California, Riverside, Riverside, CA 92521. <http://anthropology.ucr.edu/>
email: cultures@ucr.edu.

Got an announcement or an update?

Want to share it with us?

E-mail us at anthro@mail.rochester.edu
and we'll be sure to get you into the next edition!

**UNDERGRADUATE AWARDS
2001-2002****Gerald Williams Memorial Prize for Language and Culture**

During the past year, the Department has been able to donate many of the old journals, donated by Gerald E. Williams, a linguistic anthropologist and Chair of the U of R Anthropology Department until his death in 1974, to under-resourced libraries in places such as Guam and Brazil. We have also been able to sell some of the duplicate and triplicate volumes to second hand book dealers. It is with the modest proceeds of these sales that the Gerald Williams Memorial Prize Fund was established.

The Department of Anthropology established the Gerald E. Williams Memorial Prize in order to recognize and encourage the research of students on questions of language and culture, and cross-cultural communication. This years recipients were Viviana Benitez and Jessica Sagert for their joint senior seminar project, "Language, Culture and Success" and to Marleny Rubio for her senior seminar project "Japan and the United States of America: A Cross-Cultural Understanding."

Viviana and Jessica's research took place on the campus of the University of Rochester. Their goal, in their own words, was "to document on film the significance that language and culture have for success in America." For nine months they conducted ethnographic research to produce a twenty-one minute film.

Marleny's project was similarly ambitious. Marleny spent the Spring of 2001 in Japan. She decided to produce a magazine for students who would like to go Japan, or for that matter for students who wish to study another culture. Marleny's project aimed to illustrate in words and in cartoons that studying the language of the host culture is a necessary step but it is not enough to get along in a new culture. What is critical, she says, was to understand the rules for social behavior that are so different from culture to culture.

Alumni Award for Promoting Anthropology and the Public Good

For the past several years, the Department of Anthropology has oriented part of its curriculum to social issues of pressing public concern—issues such as racism, poverty and the challenges confronting American cities. In this regard, the Department has responded to a renewed sense in the field of anthropology that the discipline must apply its methods and insights to the world beyond academe. In short, anthropology must become more of a public anthropology.

Two years ago, the Department established the Alumni Award for the Promotion of Anthropology and the Public Good. Modest donations were collected from many loyal alumni of the Anthropology Department to fund the prize. Last year, the inaugural Alumni Award was given to Kate Navarra and Tessa Farmer for organizing the 2001 Spring Conference to mark the centennial of Margaret Mead—one of the foremost public anthropologists of the last century. This year's Alumni Award recipient was Teri Peart.

Teri was a member of the Black Student Union, the College Diversity Roundtable, and the Office of Admission's Multicultural Visitation Program. She served as Chief Co-ordinator of the Minority Student Advisory Board and was a volunteer mentor for at-risk students entering the University. She used her anthropological skills and knowledge of culture to design and evaluate multicultural programs and programs that contributed to the wellbeing of minority students.

EVENTS OF
ANTHROPOLOGICAL
INTEREST

INTERACTIVE PROGRAM ON WEST AFRICA

West Africa: Myth versus Reality was held on Tuesday, October 29th at 8:30 pm in the Hoeng Faculty Basement Lounge. It was an interactive program that focused on the West African region in terms of culture, politics, and the economy. The panel consisted of study aboard students, including fourth year Anthropology major Allison Dorsey, and Ghanaian students who led the discussion. There was free authentic Ghanaian food and music.

THE 2002-2003 NEILLY SERIES

The 2002-03 Neilly Series began at 5:00 pm Thursday, September 26th, when writer Kenn Harper described the life of Minik, an Inuit boy taken from his family in the late 1800s and brought to New York. Harper first heard the story from the Polar Eskimos of Greenland and wrote the best seller, Give Me My Father's Body: The Life of Minik, the New York Eskimo. He tracked the story and documented the role of the American Museum of Natural History in the Minik affair.

Harper, who has lived in the Canadian Arctic and Greenland for more than 35 years, is a linguist fluent in the Eskimo language and an active participant in territorial issues. He was an advisor on setting up the government of Nunavut, Canada's third territory established in 1999. His lecture with slides was held in the Welles-Brown Room of Rush Rhees Library on the River Campus.

AFRICA VIDEO & FILM SERIES**"The Case for Black Reparations"**

The purpose of the video was to provide a factual background to the contemporary reparations issue now being discussed in the political arena. Viewers would be better prepared to participate in the Frederick Douglass Institute's upcoming panel discussion on "Reparations for African Americans: An American Dilemma?" held November 20th at 6:30 pm in the Welles-Brown Room in Rush Rhees Library. The event was held on November 6th at 5:00 pm in Morey 302 and was sponsored by the Frederick Douglass Institute for African and African American Studies.

"Ken Saro-Wiwa: An African Martyr"

Ken Saro-Wiwa is a celebrated Ogoni writer and was a noted environmentalist who boldly campaigned for the rights of Nigeria's Ogoni people, suffering from decades of resource exploitation by foreign oil companies and the dictatorship of the former military regimes. The video allowed audiences to hear his views, poetry, hopes and dreams. Given the important discourse on reliable oil resources, this is a timely documentary that provides insight into how people from oil producing regions often do not benefit from the wealth produced by others. The event took place on Wednesday, October 16th, at 5:00 pm in Morey 302.

FORMER WEAPONS INSPECTOR SPEAKS AT THE U OF R

Scott Ritter, former chief UNSCOM weapons inspector in Iraq, has been speaking all over the U.S., discussing the controversial Bush administration plans to invade Iraq. During the presentation, Ritter spoke bluntly about American foreign policy surrounding Iraq. He has recently become one of the most vocal denouncers of Bush's war plans. He spoke to a packed audience at the University of Rochester on November 7th at 5:00 pm in Hoyt Hall.

EVENTS OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL INTEREST
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**ARCHEOZOOLOGIST VISITS U OF R
CLASS**

Dr. Carol Cope, an archeozoologist, was in town and agreed to speak during Professor Aviam's course "Archaeology of Ancient Galilee" on Thursday, November 14th, 2002. She discussed the butchering patterns in archaeological sites as a proof for Kashrut laws. The talk was in Lattimore 210 at 7:00 pm. It was open to the public.

**The AAA is Celebrating it's
Centennial!**

This year the AAA's 101st Annual Meeting was held in New Orleans!

The meeting were being held from November 20-24, 2002 at the Hyatt Regency in New Orleans, Louisiana.

In attendance from the U of R were

Professor Robert Foster

Professor Thomas Gibson

Professor Nancy Forand

Professor Ernestine McHugh

(Eastman School of Music)

To learn more about this year's meetings visit

<http://www.aaanet.org/mtgs/mtgs.htm>

**ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDER
SPEAKS IN ROCHESTER**

María Luisa Acosta, defender of the environment and indigenous peoples in eastern Nicaragua, spoke to Rochester area residents on Tuesday, November 19th, at 7:30 pm at the First Unitarian Church. The event was sponsored by the Ciudad Hermana Task Force of Metro Justice, the Rochester Committee on Latin Americans (ROCLA) and the Nicaragua Network.

Indigenous communities in eastern Nicaragua—which have been living in self-sustaining harmony with nature for centuries—face the incursion of multinational corporations eager to reap profits. Thanks to attorney María Luisa Acosta, the rainforest and its indigenous inhabitants now have a chance. She is their chief legal representation in their efforts to defend fragile ecosystems and indigenous solidarity.

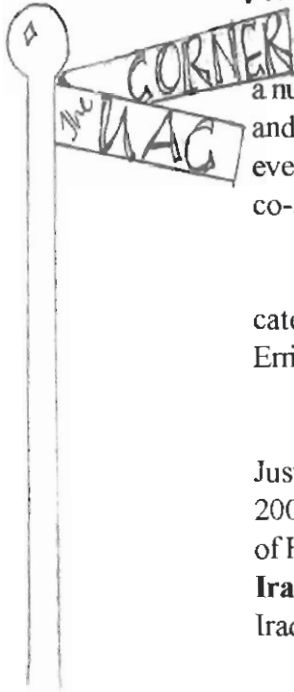
Her work has not been without a price, however. It is widely believed that the recent murder of her husband, Francisco Garcia, is connected to her efforts to protect the Pearl Islands from an illegal land grab by U.S. citizen Peter Tsokos.

For more information on the Nicaragua Network feel free to e-mail at nicanet@afgj.org.

Susan B. Anthony Institute Faculty Research Seminar

This research seminar featured Professor Ayala Emmett of the Anthropology Department. Professor Emmett discussed the new 2003 edition of her book Our Sisters' Promised Land: Women, Politics and Israeli-Palestinian Coexistence. It was held on November 18th, 2002 in 540 Lattimore Hall from 12:30-2:00 pm. The River Campus Barnes & Noble has Professor Emmett's book on order.

The Undergraduate Anthropology Council Corner



The UAC has been busy! We have had numerous events this semester and a number of co-sponsorships with other organizations. We have grown in number and, therefore, increased our ability to become more involved with on-campus events. Below is a run-down of the events that have been either solely sponsored or co-sponsored by the UAC so far this semester.

On Friday, October 18th, 2002, students were invited to participate in a catered lunch with the Morgan Lecturers Deborah Gewertz and Frederick Errington.

We co-sponsored an event with the UR Students for Social Justice, Metro Justice of Rochester and Amnesty International, which was held on October 23rd, 2002. The event featured speaker Professor Nabil Kaylani from RIT's Department of History. This event entitled, "**Globalization, Pre-emption and the Question of Iraq,**" was a public discussion on the U.S. Administration's possible Invasion of Iraq and its possible connection to globalizaiton.

On November 1st, 2002, we sponsored a fireside chat entitled, "**Creativity, Imagination and the Transmission of Cultural Infomation: A Discussion on Creative Ethnography.**" The discussants were Ayala Emmett from the Department of Anthropology and senior anthropology major, Katie Hotra. This event probed at how we can use creativity, innovation and anthropology to best communicate a cultural experience, event, or issue to a larger audience. The discussion was an introduction to what Professor Emmett will be focusing on in her course ANT 274, "Creative Ethnography."

Our next event is entitled "**NONVIOLENT REGIME CHANGE: A Peaceful Alternative to War with Iraq?**" It is a public forum on nonviolent conflict, featuring the showing of the PBS Documentary film: "Bringing Down a Dictator" (2000; The downfall of Serbian dictator Milosevic) and will be followed by panel discussion/open forum of questions and answers. Panelists include Jack Duvall, Professor Ayala Emmett and Professor Robert Holmes. The event will take place Wednesday, December 4th, with a reception at 6:30 pm and the program following at 7:00 pm in Hubbell Auditorium. The event is being co-sponsored with UR Peace, Newman Community, UR Students for Social Justice, Grassroots and Amnesty International.

For more information on upcoming UAC events go to

http://www.rochester.edu/college/ANT/students_uac.html

or

Check out events sponsored by the Anthropology Department at

<http://www.rochester.edu/calendar>

From the Editor's Desk

It is hard to believe that we are nearing the end of this year's fall semester. It has been a busy semester, evidenced by the amount of events that the Anthropology Department and the UAC have been involved with. Because of our activeness in events this semester, it has been a time of new and exciting opportunities for us to get anthropological perspectives out on our campus and in the community.

One of the UAC's co-sponsored events entitled "Globalization, Pre-emption and the Question of Iraq" drew over 65 students and community members together for dialogue over the controversies surrounding Iraq presently. Anthropology students from our college have worked individually and networked collectively with anthropology students from all over the Rochester area to protest the prospect of war in Iraq and to dialogue with one another. Anthropology Professors Tom Gibson and Ayala Emmett have both been willing to bring anthropological perspectives to discussion panels and lectures on the subject.

An anthropology professor from Rochester Institute of Technology once told me that anthropology is not a social science of comfort. If we begin to critique and challenge American culture in a time where we are told to be critical is to be un-American, we are faced with a difficult dilemma. As members of American culture, we are

Questions or comments on any articles or upcoming events? Please feel free to contact us!

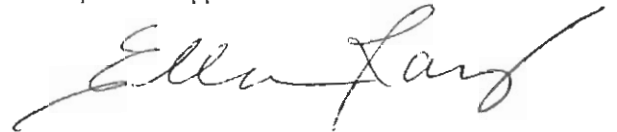
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forced to question our own cultural notions as we challenge others. However, if we do not ask the cultural questions and if we do not challenge the status quo, who will? The number of anthropology students, faculty and staff who have not shied away from that challenge has encouraged me greatly.

It is my belief that it is important, now more than ever, for anthropologists to be more reflexive and more willing to challenge cultural beliefs and attitudes presented to us as part of an American consensus. I have been taught in my years here that it is and has been our responsibility to attempt to place controversies in a larger cultural context. In this case, it is especially important, in the face of Bush's seemingly "unified America," to ask the challenging questions of American culture. Now, more than ever, anthropology is an indispensable social science and I am happy that we have and, hopefully, will continue to have the opportunity to bring our perspectives and questions to the table.

For those of you who would like to include an editorial or note that is not necessarily an update, submissions of all sorts are always welcome. Also, if you will be in the Rochester area and would like to participate in a UAC sponsored event, please contact me to make arrangements. We always appreciate your input and support.



Mark Your Calendar

* December 12, 2002
Last Day of Classes

* December 13-15, 2002
Reading Period

* December 16-22, 2002
Exam Week

* December 23-January 14, 2003
Winter Break

* January 15, 2003
Classes Resume