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## Teaching and Learning Anthropology

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Review of Perspectives: An Open Invitation to Cultural Anthropology

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## REVIEW

### ***Perspectives: An Open Invitation to Cultural Anthropology* edited by Nina Brown, Laura Tubelle de González, and Thomas McIlwraith**

Arlington, VA: American Anthropological Association, 2017. Available at <http://perspectives.americananthro.org/>

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*Perspectives: An Open Invitation to Cultural Anthropology* is an indispensable resource for those who regularly teach Introduction to Cultural Anthropology and other general education courses that serve anthropology majors and non-majors. As a free, open access textbook that is easily accessible online, it serves an important purpose beyond enlightening first-time cultural anthropology students. During the 2016-17 academic year, I served as an “Affordable Learning Solutions” ambassador on my campus with the goal of reducing course material costs and promoting accessibility for students.<sup>1</sup> While researching ways to make this possible, I discovered that few disciplines have high-quality open access textbooks. I also struggled to find a high-quality comprehensive resource that I felt comfortable assigning in my own classes, despite the many useful pedagogical resources and open access articles available to teaching anthropologists. The open access textbook landscape remained dispiriting and surprisingly nonexistent until *Perspectives*.

I first heard about *Perspectives* on a social media platform, and I have used it in some form in all of my undergraduate anthropology courses since its publication. I use it as a primary text in *Introduction to Cultural Anthropology* most often, and I assign chapters as background readings in other courses. The book contains eighteen standalone chapters and four additional resources (e.g., interviews with Philippe Bourgois and Carolyn Nordstrom). The chapters span the full spectrum of requisite introductory anthropological topics from the culture concept, family and marriage, and race and ethnicity, to political anthropology, culture and sustainability, and media anthropology. Each chapter has an extensive bibliography, encouraging students to explore these references and consult additional resources like YouTube videos and popular media articles. Despite the chapters’ distinctiveness, each individually conveys a clear sense of why anthropology

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the California State University’s Affordable Learning Solutions program, see <http://als.csuprojects.org>.

matters today. Whether this is achieved through discussion questions or extensive hyperlinks to additional multimedia resources, the authors effectively communicate the relevance of the discipline and its significance to majors, non-majors, and a general public.

The non-linear format engendered through an open access platform and chapter-by-chapter downloads creates the possibility of tacking between and across concepts with students or structuring a course in a way that reflects each instructor's particular interests. This format also allows instructors to offer refreshers and optional readings for students who may have forgotten the utility of ethnographic methods or foundational concepts such as cultural relativism. The book can be read in an internet browser or downloaded either as an EPub file (52MB) for viewing on compatible eBook devices (e.g., iBooks) or as a PDF (17MB). The searchability of the book allows students to quickly locate an ethnographic vignette, glossary term, or concept.

The "Gender and Sexuality" chapter (Mukhopadhyay et al.) is especially detailed with multiple cross-cultural examples drawn from ethnographic experience, ongoing research, and the 2016 U.S. Presidential election as discussion points. The chapter has a section dedicated to the anthropology of the body, although it relegates underrepresented fields such as (dis)ability studies and "bodies and borders" to the footnotes. Although these choices may reflect the authors' research experience and personal interests, it should also be read as a call to further develop these chapters and resources in the future.

Laura Nader's chapter, "The Development of Anthropological Ideas," lays out the fundamental concepts that frame any *Introduction to Cultural Anthropology* course while also introducing specializations that range from political economy to law and urban anthropology. The chapter "Doing Fieldwork: Methods in Cultural Anthropology" (Nelson) covers ethical considerations with a link to the American Anthropological Association's "Code of Ethics" and a link to an informative short film about how Stefan Helmreich, Erica James, and Heather Paxson came to their respective fieldsites. These narratives offer perspectives beyond those of the author and instructor of a course and serve to remind students that anthropology itself is a diverse discipline.

In one of the four additional resources, "Can Anthropology Save the World?" Nancy Scheper-Hughes offers a set of "Operating Instructions for the New Generation of Anthropologists," reminding us that anthropology is not easy. The rules she presents are applicable for all students navigating an increasingly expensive university system—a navigation that may include transitioning from a community college to a four-year university or returning to the classroom after years away. *Perspectives*, as a whole, supports students who are navigating the complex landscape of higher education by serving as an accessible, relatable, and free tool.

In future revisions, I would like to see a deeper discussion of visual anthropology and anthropological perspectives on visual culture. While there is mention of the subfield in

the chapter on “Performance” (Griffith and Marion), there is little that speaks to the breadth and critical engagement that the discipline has taken around visual worlds and the ethics of photographic representation in ethnography and other multimodal platforms. Dialogue across the authors might call into question the use of fieldwork images of young children posing with an anthropologist (seen in Nelson’s chapter)—what purpose do these serve in articulating ethnographic methods to introductory students beyond raising questions about consent and ethics? While the “Preface” raises this very issue, the images throughout the text often fail to demonstrate such reflexivity.

Despite this shortcoming, the book could not be timelier. Discussions about open access are on the minds of educators at institutions where many of our students work full time. In our current precarious moment, it is important to make anthropology more accessible, and open access publications serve this purpose. In the meantime, noting the editors’ call for additional contributions, chapters on social justice, the anthropology of education, the anthropology of food, and multispecies ethnography might be a good start. I look forward to future iterations of *Perspectives* that will take on this necessary project. In some ways, *Perspectives* feels like a work in progress—in a good way. It is a malleable text that one expects to grow over time in collaboration with disciplinary developments and new research.