

Collecting to the Core — Classic Ethnographies

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Column Editor's Note: The "Collecting to the Core" column highlights monographic works that are essential to the academic library within a particular discipline, inspired by the *Resources for College Libraries* bibliography (online at <http://www.rclweb.net>). In each essay, subject specialists introduce and explain the classic titles and topics that continue to remain relevant to the undergraduate curriculum and library collection. Disciplinary trends may shift, but some classics never go out of style. — AD

approach to *how* a user interacts with a device can extend to overthrow common conceptions about *what a user can do* with a device. In the case of a computer on your wrist, and in the context of *Against the Grain*, the first thing that comes to mind is text-to-voice. eBooks are tiny, and use very little bandwidth in comparison with the depth and richness of their content (excluding a number of popular bestsellers, that is). Perhaps the rise of the worn device will usher in a fresh look at the licensing of text-to-voice as a mode for content presentation. Don't be misled, however. Today's headlines also speak of **Apple's** efforts to stand up a television service. Does anyone think, if today's high school and college student adopt "Smartwatches" to the extent they've adopted cell phones, that they won't be watching YouTube on them? And that brings us to networking — not what you do on Linked-In, but what those administrators run at your company or in your building.


"Fashion disaster: What the launch of **Apple Watch** could mean for the health of your network"

This last one is the headline on a thoughtful article by **Jeremy Cowan** on the *m2mmow.com* Website.

Cowan is a network administrator. "Keeping networks up and running is my business, and so anything that will connect to them piques my interest," says **Cowan**. He cites a recent survey of European businesses in which 36% of those business polled expect "wearable technology" to come into the workplace this year, but, he notes, "Only 13% of the IT professionals we spoke to have given consideration to how this will affect their IT policies."

It is a telling fact that around a third of those surveyed expect "wearable technology" to connect to their networks this year. Surely, more than a third of them have had reason to be familiar with issues surrounding "BYOD" (Bring Your Own Device). And yet only 16% have given any thought to how a significant bump in the number of devices trying to access their networks may effect network administration. What will happen when folks want to open a Skype session on their Smartwatch, or watch YouTube, or watch the Olympics?

The only consolation may be in headlines like this last one:

"**Apple Inc.'s** Watch Not on Shopping List of Most Americans, According To Poll." 

Ethnographies are the primary literature of social and cultural anthropology. Ethnography is also the term used to describe the process, practices, and methods used by social anthropologists performing the fieldwork that results in published ethnographies. Traditionally, anthropological fieldwork took place in small-scale, non-western societies (a village or a tribal community), while today such research may take place in virtually any community, even an urban one not unfamiliar to the ethnographer. The study of any definable community may produce an anthropological ethnography, whether that community has a defined border (such as an inner-city neighborhood undergoing gentrification, a military school, or a religious congregation) or not (a multicontinental diasporic community). And while ethnographic fieldwork was once practiced almost exclusively by anthropologists, it is now used by researchers in a wide array of disciplines in the social sciences (economics, political science, communications, and public health, to name a few). In his very useful article "Ethnography" in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, linguistic anthropologist **Michael H. Agar** discusses whether "the many 'ethnography-like' approaches in other fields should be considered acceptable or not."¹ Regardless of the debate surrounding the use of ethnographic methods in other disciplines, this article focuses on eleven classic ethnographies written by anthropologists and based on anthropological ethnographic fieldwork.

Before anthropologists embarked on fieldwork, readers had only anecdotal cultural reports produced by travel writers, journalists, and missionaries. The authors of the works described in this essay, however, were more than just visitors to their selected communities; rather, they became deeply embedded within them. These ethnographies span 80 years of scholarly publishing and are discussed in order of their original publication from 1888 to 1969. They also range across the

globe, representing communities in Africa, East and Southeast Asia, North America, and South America.

The first two ethnographies focus on indigenous peoples of North America. *The Central Eskimo* (1888) by **Franz Boas** dates from anthropology's earliest years as a distinct discipline (ethnography being previously within the purview of academic departments such as geography or natural philosophy).² **Boas**, often considered the father of American anthropology, studied physics and geography in his native Germany and published on a wide range of anthropological subjects over a long career. He first encountered the Inuit (as they are now called) on an expedition to chart Baffin Island, Canada, and *The Central Eskimo* appeared as part of the **Smithsonian Institution's** 6th Annual Report covering 1866-67. **Alfred L. Kroeber** trained in the anthropology program at **Columbia University** under the direction of **Franz Boas**, earning the first PhD awarded in the department in 1901. **Kroeber's** *The Arapaho*, which first appeared in a four-part journal article from 1902 to 1907, was a published version of his doctoral dissertation.³ It is interesting to note that both of these early ethnographies were not originally published as "stand-alone"

monographs, but rather as articles produced by major U.S. ethnographic museums. The same was true for the many ethnographic treatises coming out of the great national museums of Europe in the mid- to late-19th century.

Crossing the Pacific Ocean, the next three ethnographies are from Southeast Asia, Melanesia, and Polynesia. **A.R. Radcliffe-Brown** was a British social anthropologist who studied a number of different societies. His earliest ethnographic fieldwork took him to the Bay of

Bengal between India and Myanmar and resulted in his first major ethnography, *The Andaman Islanders*, published in 1922.⁴ **Radcliffe-Brown** is considered a founder of structural functionalism, a framework for theory-building that looks at social structures and social functions. **Bronislaw Malinowski** was a Polish anthropologist who trained at the **London School of Economics**. Specializing in economic anthropology, he studied traditional exchange systems in Australia and the Trobriand Islands, part of New Guinea. The latter resulted in his classic ethnography *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, published in 1922 and reprinted many times since then, most recently in 2014 with a new introduction by **Adam Kuper**.⁵ The next classic ethnography — *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928)

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— was produced by **Margaret Mead**, one of anthropology's earliest public intellectuals.⁶ Like **Kroeber**, **Mead** was a student of **Franz Boas** at **Columbia**, and **Boas** contributed the preface to the first edition. Reprinted many times, it most recently appeared in 2001 with introductions by **Mary Pipher** and by **Mead's** daughter, the anthropologist **Mary Catherine Bateson**. **Mead's** observations in *Coming of Age in Samoa* detailed adolescents' sexual lives and were based on informant accounts, the reliability of which has stirred debate in recent decades and generated criticism by at least one scholar.⁷

Turning to Africa, the first of two classic ethnographies is *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, by **E. E. Evans-Pritchard**.⁸ The Azande are an ethnic group living today in several Central African countries. **Evans-Pritchard** arrived among them in 1926 to do fieldwork for his PhD dissertation at the **London School of Economics**. His ethnography was published in 1937 and reprinted numerous times, most recently in 1976. The next African ethnography, *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu*, is atypical both because author **Jomo Kenyatta** was writing about his own tribe and, although a trained anthropologist, he did not pursue an academic career but rather had a storied political career.⁹ **Kenyatta** wrote this classic ethnography in 1938 about the Kikuyu (the more accepted spelling of the name) people of Kenya after studying social anthropology at **University College London** under **Malinowski**. With an introduction by **Malinowski**, *Facing Mount Kenya* is distinguished as having been later translated into Swahili, making it accessible to contemporary Kenyan readers.¹⁰

Along with **Margaret Mead**, the female authors of the following two ethnographies were pioneers in early social anthropology. **Cora Du Bois** was influenced by **Boas** at **Columbia** and by **Kroeber** at **UC-Berkeley**, where she got her PhD in 1932. Her classic ethnography *The People of Alor* resulted from her fieldwork on an Indonesian island in the 1930s.¹¹ It was published in 1944 and reprinted in 1960. **Du Bois** was the second woman to receive tenure in the faculty of arts and sciences at **Harvard** and the first in its department of anthropology. **Ruth Benedict**, the author of *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, earned her PhD under **Boas** at **Columbia** in 1923 and in 1948 became the first woman to be promoted to full professor in the faculty of political science there.¹² *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* is the only ethnography discussed here that was not a result of traditional fieldwork. **Benedict** worked for the Office of War Information (OWI) during World War II, and her research on Japanese culture using newspaper clippings, films, and interviews with Japanese Americans was intended to influence post-war understanding and treatment of the Japanese. The book was translated into Japanese in 1948, and was most recently reprinted in 2005 with a new foreword by **Ian Buruma**.

Yanomamö: The Fierce People, written by **Napoleon A. Chagnon** and published in 1968, details the culture and lives of South America's indigenous Yanomamö group.¹³ **Chagnon**, the only one of the 11 ethnographers discussed here still living, continues to work in the Amazon rain forest among the Yanomamö, though not without criticism. In 2000 journalist **Patrick Tierney** wrote a harsh exposé of **Chagnon's** work which still reverberates today.¹⁴ **Chagnon** countered in 2013 with *Noble Savages: My Life among Two Dangerous Tribes — the Yanomamö and the Anthropologists*, which is recommended in part because **Chagnon's** original ethnography continues to be included on many reading lists for undergraduate anthropology classes.¹⁵

The world of the **Pueblo** peoples of the American southwest is the subject of the last classic ethnography, **Alfonso Ortiz's** *The Tewa World*.¹⁶ Considered a landmark in the anthropology of the Rio Grande Pueblos, this title has retained its scholarly value more than four decades after its original 1969 publication. Like **Kenyatta** above, **Ortiz** was a member of the society he studied and faced some criticism for allowing outsiders to learn about Pueblo rituals and sacred practices. The Tewa Pueblo that **Ortiz** wrote about had been long known by the name San Juan Pueblo; in 2005, it officially returned to its prehispanic form of Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo.

How can anthropology bibliographers select among all the anthropological ethnographies being published today those that will be considered classics in the future? Reprints or new editions, especially with the added value of updated introductions by eminent anthropologists, warrant consideration, especially if your library does not own the original edition. Selectors might also choose award-winning works. The **Victor Turner Prize in Ethnographic Writing** is given annually by the **Society for Humanistic Anthropology**, and a **Senior Book Prize** is given semi-annually by the **American Ethnological Society**. Both groups are divisions of the **American Anthropological Association**.

Ethnographic research has evolved since the fieldwork represented in the ethnographies here, but the goals of anthropological ethnographies have not. Classic anthropological ethnographies, of which these eleven are but a small sample, continue to be essential for academic library collections and are used regularly in anthropology classes, as well as area, ethnic, and gender studies classes. The communities studied in these classic ethnographies have all evolved since they were first visited by these anthropologists, some of them so drastically as to be unrecognizable today. Many have been revisited and restudied by different anthropologists posing different questions. It is for these reasons that these works are foundational for all future research; each one constitutes a record, subjective or incomplete though it may be, of a culture at a certain point in time, and it is our culture in all its variety and contrast that makes us human. 🍌

Endnotes

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Editor's note: An asterisk () denotes a title selected for *Resources for College Libraries*.