

Grading has become particularly tedious, given the rampant grade inflation that has become the norm across the nation. In one of Vilma's courses this semester, she slyly commented that a "C" was a perfectly good grade for the course. Students were extremely alarmed at the thought. Perhaps final course grades have become like the theory of legal sentencing Vilma heard from former law professor Helen Silving.

Silving had come to the U of Puerto Rico from Germany as a WWII refugee. Since she had already spent several decades in Puerto Rico by the time Vilma encountered her, details of her biography were somewhat obscure, especially to new students. The implications were that she was Jewish and had fled Nazi persecution.

A petite woman, always elegantly turned-out in dark tailored clothes and discrete but genuine jewelry, Silving always was surrounded by a coterie of students who were fervent admirers of her work—often men, as she was a very handsome woman, as well as an expert in civil liberties and in criminal law. One of the questions she had considered throughout her long career was the purpose and meaning of sentencing. What are we, as a society, attempting to accomplish by sentencing criminals to a number of years in a total institution after they are judged in a trial? Some argue that sheer punishment, harkening back to the biblical prescriptions of the Judeo-Christian tradition, is at the root of the practice. Others talk of the symbolics of restitution: the criminal must give up chunks of his or her lifetime to make up for the harm done. Yet others claim that sentencing satisfies a need for retribution that will allow victims to feel compensated.

For Silving, though, none of these were satisfactory explanations for the perpetuation of sentencing as an adequate resolution for criminal acts. She argued that the real purpose was to document the occurrence of crime. That is, as a society, we needed a mechanism for inscribing the resolution of a criminal act in a more meaningful way than words on a page. By warehousing the living bodies of criminals, we retain consciousness, as a society, that crime has occurred.

In our most cynical moments, we may think of grades as the academic analogue to Silving's argument: grades do not exist as an individual measure of the fulfillment of a performance standard. Grade inflation, credentialism and careerism work to obliterate that meaning. Furthermore, college populations increasingly have been socialized, in high school and throughout life, to think of education as merely preparing for the next standardized test. In such a situation, course grades may do little more than document that a given individual has passed through a given course at a given point in time.

Awareness of a problem is the first step toward a solution. And although documentation may be institutionally sufficient, in the long term it is not satisfactory for teachers, students or society. There have been a variety of experiments in alternative grading schemes, although none is widespread. The attitudes and policies of our college-educated lawmakers and businessmen and lead-

ers toward education demonstrate that we must find ways to foster a deeper appreciation of education, rather than grades, for more than just the very best students.

2002 SHA Sessions

Alma Gottlieb is our program chair for the 2002 Annual Meeting. Please contact her at ajgottli@uiuc.edu with your ideas for sessions.

Contact either of us at Dept of Anthropology, 265 McGraw Hall, Cornell U, Ithaca, NY 14853; tel 607/255-6773 (Fred); fax 607/255-3747. Email Fred at fwg1@cornell.edu (that's the number 1 after fwg, not the letter l) or Vilma at vs23@cornell.edu.

Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists

BARBARA WEST, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

There is legislation currently pending that could play a significant role in the lives of LGBTQ people throughout the US. To find out more about these bills or to send messages to your senators and House representative, take a look at the Human Rights Campaign website at www.hrc.org/issues/index.asp.

I begin with the bill that is the most significant for my Australian partner and me, and perhaps for other anthropologists who have spent long periods of time outside of their passport countries: HR 690. The full name of this bill, as introduced in the House last Feb, is the Permanent Partners Immigration Act of 2001. The purpose of this bill is to change US law to allow unmarried same-sex and opposite-sex partners of US citizens or permanent residents the same rights as their married counterparts when it comes to immigration. If this bill eventually becomes law, the US will finally join the ranks of the 15 other countries that currently allow for same-sex partner immigration, including Australia, Israel and South Africa. It also will mean that my partner and I won't have to pack up and leave the country when Immigration Naturalization Services decides it's time for us to go, rather than when we so desire. Please join us in supporting this important bill!

If immigration isn't your problem, no doubt you are effected by this next item, since a majority of US states fail to provide any protection for gays and lesbians facing discrimination in the workplace. Fortunately, HR 2692, or ENDA, the Employment Nondiscrimination Act, has gained significant support in the House to ban such discrimination. As of Oct 20, 2001, 185 members of the House had agreed to co-sponsor this bill as it makes its way through the legislative process. The HRC website states that according to a 2001 Gallup poll, only 11% of Americans support employment discrimination for gays and lesbians, so hopefully this bill will not face too much opposition on its way to becoming a law.

The third piece of legislation in which SOLGA readers may want to take an active interest is the

Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act. In the wake of the current federal legislation aimed at limiting civil rights in the name of national security, I read the words "law enforcement" in this bill with concern. Fortunately, this bill is aimed at actual crimes rather than potential criminals. The bill would expand federal jurisdiction over hate crimes based on race, color, religion, national origin, disability, gender and sexual orientation. Currently, only 27 states and Washington, DC, include sexual orientation in their hate crime statutes, while some states have no hate crime legislation at all. While this bill may not prevent people from perpetrating hateful acts against members of our community, it may begin the long process of social change necessary for us to be recognized as full social persons deserving of equal rights.

Please send your comments, new column ideas or other information to Barb West at bwest@uop.edu. To sign up for the SOLGA listserv, send a message to listserv@american.edu with "subscribe solga-1" in the body of the message.

Society for Linguistic Anthropology

RICHARD J SENGHAS AND JAMES STANLAW,
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

AILLA

Heidi Johnson, Project Manager for the Archive of the Indigenous Languages of Latin America (AILLA), has announced that the AILLA is undergoing significant development this year, funded by grants from NEH and NSF. This project was launched by Joel Sherzer and Tony Woodbury and others at the U of Texas-Austin last year. The goals of the archive are to preserve and maintain (in digital form) audio, text and ultimately video, as well as materials in and about the indigenous languages of Latin America; and to make those materials available globally via the Internet. The pilot site can be visited at www.ailla.org. There are three kinds of information that they would like to have with each digital resource, most of which has to be given to them by the depositor: 1) the provenance of the resource (e.g., time and place of original recording); 2) whether access to the resource is restricted, and if so, who can access it; and 3) information about the content of the resource (e.g., its speech genre). This third type is what will make searches more fruitful for developing more finely tuned archive searches. Questions or comments about this site or suggestions for its future interface may be sent to ailla@ailla.org.

Survey of Linguistic Anthropology Hires

Last year, Robert MacLaury was appointed by the SLA's president to compile statistics on how linguistic anthropologists are doing in the academic job market. MacLaury is interested in knowing about all linguistic anthropology openings filled

in 2001, including descriptions of the positions; who was chosen for the positions; and the recipients' degrees, fields and year degrees were awarded. The statistics will be presented to the SLA. If you were part of any such hiring process (hired for, accepted or applied unsuccessfully for any such position), please contact MacLaury at maclaury@sas.upenn.edu. Over the past several years, the SLA has been conducting surveys and gathering statistics on linguistic anthropologists. These data should prove useful as we develop and modify curricula for future cohorts.

Endangered Languages Conference

SSILA Bulletin #149 has reported that the proceedings of the Fifth Conference of the Foundation for Endangered Languages—"Endangered Languages and the Media"—held in Agadir, Morocco, are now available. Copies are £15 or US\$25 plus shipping and handling. For details, contact: Nicholas Ostler, Foundation for Endangered Languages, Batheaston Villa, 172 Bailbrook Lane, Bath BA1 7AA, England; nostler@chibcha.demon.co.uk.

Calls for Fieldwork Advice

Do you recall short pieces of advice you were given before heading out to the field? Or, after having found out the hard way, do you have suggestions that new fieldworkers should hear? AN Managing Editor Stacy Lathrop has made a call for such items to use as small fillers in the odd blank spaces in the AN. With all the changes in technology used for the collection of language and communication, I imagine linguistic fieldworkers could provide very useful advice to our fellow anthropologists. Which types of microphones are useful (or not); remembering to douse the tally-light on a video camera, especially in darker settings, to help reduce the intrusiveness of our equipment during taping; or the problems of compression of digital data all would be useful points we might contribute. If you have items, contact Jim Stanlaw (see email address below) or Stacy Lathrop (slathrop@aaanet.org).

Farewell from Richard Senghas

At the time of this column's submission, the choice of my successor as SLA Contributing Editor had not been finalized, although we expected to announce the lucky soul at the 2001 AAA Annual Meeting in Washington, DC. Nevertheless, this is my last column, and I wish to thank all those who have sent contributions, tips or leads, helping to keep this column useful for all our members. I appreciate the opportunity the SLA has given me by allowing me to serve as Contributing Editor, where I've learned a lot about what goes on in linguistic anthropology circles (and how and why!). Cyndi Dunn and Jim Stanlaw have been great partners in this task. Thanks. Best wishes to my successor!

Send contributions and comments to SLA Contributing Editor Jim Stanlaw at stanlaw@ilstu.edu.

Society for Medical Anthropology

ANN MILES AND FRED BLOOM, CO-CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Structural Violence and the Assault on Human Rights

By Paul Farmer (Harvard U)

A growing number of medical anthropologists devote attention to structural violence. Just as everyone seems to have their own definition of "structure" and "violence," the term itself causes epistemological jitters in our ranks. The term dates back at least to Johannes Galtung and also to the liberation theologians who used it to describe "sinful" social structures characterized by poverty and steep grades of social inequality (including race and gender inequality). In short, structural violence is the social machinery of oppression.

The degree to which people can fight back has been the subject of much anthropological inquiry. We've written about "weapons of the weak" (James Scott's term), and some texts celebrate various forms of "resistance." Romanticism aside, the impact of poverty and social marginalization is profound in many of the settings in which we work, including not only the slums and villages of the Third World (or whatever it's called these days) but the cities of the US. In some of these settings there really is spirited resistance. Sometimes, however, the impact of resistance is less than we make it out to be. The degree to which agency is constrained correlates, if not always neatly, with the ability to resist marginalization and other forms of oppression.

Anthropologists have considered both anthropology and human rights, as well as the anthropology of human rights (P J Magnarella, E Messer, T Downing and G Kushner, for example). Many anthropologists are interested in human rights, but these are not always the same ones interested in structural violence. Yet, surely the majority of human rights abuses, however defined, occur among those whose agency is most constrained by poverty, gender inequality and racism.

That's why the best places to understand the impact of structural violence are also places where human rights are violated most egregiously. These concerns come together in settings of explosive violence, usually directed against the poor. In Haiti, for example, it was impossible to study tuberculosis or AIDS without running into the terrible poverty that determined risk. It was impossible to follow the trajectories of patients and families and not learn of death squads, arrests and beatings, to say nothing of hunger and privation. It is, in fact, jarring to read the work of scholars of Haiti who do *not* write explicitly of structural violence and the human rights abuses it engenders. Others, such as Linda Green working in Guatemala and Leigh Binford in El Salvador, have had similar experiences.

Surely there is something that medical anthropologists can offer to the struggle for human rights. As a contextualizing discipline, anthropology could add the word *social* to rights. And since the *economic* undergirding of social life is ever-apparent, we could add the word *economic*, too. But what are social and economic rights? Usually, these include the right to food, housing, education, health care and employment. By definition, these rights are violated daily in most places we work, and often opposed by those who wish to maintain their privilege. But why would the campaign for social and economic rights trigger ambivalence *within the human rights community*? In mainstream rights discourse, social and economic rights are sometimes called "second-generation rights," and accorded less importance than civil and political rights. Within the human rights community, social and economic rights are the neglected stepchildren of human rights. There's a subtext, of course. It's hard enough to push for civil and political rights. To struggle for social and economic rights is "unrealistic."

Medical anthropologists could offer a great deal to our understanding of such rights and why they are difficult, but necessary, to promote. The goal here is not theoretical, but to contextualize the struggle for human rights and to understand the motivations of the strange bedfellows that crowd this social field (remember, Henry Kissinger was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize). Another task is to subject elite discourses, including our own, as well as legalistic discourses, to critical scrutiny. This exercise calls for re-socializing analyses. Why would we promote certain rights (e.g., the right to vote) and not others (e.g., the right to health care, employment and housing)? Anthropological inquiry could help reveal why the idea of the right to food, housing and education runs counter to neoliberal thought, *the* hegemonic force of our times.

Anthropologists also could reveal the mechanisms by which structural violence inevitably begets human rights violations. This is not voyeurism, since too often the violence is "explained away" using concepts we've circulated. The term "culture" is the prime example. One chief mechanism of obfuscation is *the conflation of cultural difference and structural violence*. This occurs whenever violence, the product of *transnationally* structured inequalities, is attributed to *local* cultural patterns. So, in Haiti, Guatemala and El Salvador, undemocratic governments and their pals in the US Dept of State were quick to point to local "cultures of violence" to deflect attention from the real causes of rights violations. Who better to counter these fabrications than those who deal in culture for a living?

In closing, I'd like to pose some questions for anthropologists interested in human rights. Who is at risk of having their rights violated? How might risk knowledge prevent abuses? How are rights violations structured by social inequalities? How often do rights discourses conflate cultural difference with structural violence? How do these discourses hide the dynamics of violations by refusing to consider structural violence, which