

## Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists

DAVID L R HOUSTON, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

### The "Sophisticated Audience"

It has been a challenging month. The wake of the one of the country's largest natural disasters leaves a devastating imprint. A well-known evangelist calls for the assassination of a foreign leader—deemed a *fatwa* by national newspapers. An editorialist from Florida suggests "[Pat] Robertson is a problem on the world's stage where some audiences may be less sophisticated" (Parker, *Burlington Free Press*, Aug 30, 2005). "Sophisticated audience" is hard to overlook.

This idea of the "sophisticated audience" is deeply embedded into the American conscience. It is pervasive, not because we foster or teach it in some way, but because of how Americans see themselves in the world. Americans are somehow inherently "sophisticated"; we can see past the problem of Robertson on the world stage, that he speaks for himself as an individual simply because we are who we are. It is nearly axiomatic. It is even right there in the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident." The Founders cannot be wrong.

Our challenge is to find ways to push past this ingrained, reflexive assumption and to do so without alienation, without partisanship, indeed without any agenda at all other than that of the practicing anthropologist with an interest in opening minds (and possibly hearts). Our discipline has had its fair share of reflexive navel-gazing. The *nave* is tired and we have moved on—a little. We are also a specialized sub-culture in an ocean of ideas, often criticized for an isolation that self-promotes publication and academe. Consider, though, the perspective of others not in our field.

There is the article about volunteer truckers taking relief supplies from Williston, Vermont to Mississippi in non-stop 30-hour runs. They are agape at the havoc and destruction. This is not something found in this country, but somewhere else, somewhere far away. This experience may well be the closest to a "third world" country that these individuals will ever know. This is a new approach to "sophistication." It is an experience of awareness building, an inescapable self-reflection. Why must this come at such a high price?

### Connecting the Dots

One week later, we read about the custody battle heard at the state Supreme Court, a broken commitment from a Civil Union, Vermont's "not-quite-marriage" law passed in 2000. The focus is on the nature of the Civil Union itself, and the challenges inherent in a legal construction built piecemeal across the country—different laws apply in each state. The matter of sophisticated audience here is, while not entirely moot, not a big issue. The Civil Union debate forced many Vermonters to look closely at the arguments. "Sophistication" was at least part of what one

needed to understand the issues. In this lengthy article, there is one curious omission. Lawyers for one side are from the "Florida-based Liberty Counsel," a detail never fully elaborated.

"Curiouser and curiouser," cries this reader. The Liberty Counsel bills itself as an organization devoted to "Restoring the Culture One Case at a Time by Advancing Religious Freedom, the Sanctity of Human Life and the Traditional Family"—a mission that certainly seems to fit this case. Where is the sophistication here? Can the pain of one or two individuals be any less a measure of "sophistication" by the same popular press?

Often our task as anthropologists is to teach, whether by wrote or by inquiry, and that task is challenged when our own ideas about sophistication are so far from the ideas of the larger populations in which we maneuver. That any audience is deemed "sophisticated enough" to understand that an individual calling for assassination is the "privilege" of individual expression, but is unlikely to be able to "connect the dots" in a complex case of emotions is unfortunate. It suggests that the work we do may not be finding the kind of audience that might accrue the greatest benefit. "Sophistication" should not be defined by popular editorializing, nor through pain and suffering. It should be an exposure on many levels.

*Please send any comments, suggestions, ideas for new columns or other material to David Houston at [dlrh+an@uvm.edu](mailto:dlrh+an@uvm.edu).*

## Society for Linguistic Anthropology

JAMES STANLAW AND MARK PETERSON,  
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

### Rough Guide to Language Panels at AAA

Welcome to Washington DC! There's a great lineup of language panels this year, but as usual, the arcane system of allotting times and spaces has placed many of them in slots that compete for our attention. Here's a quick introduction.

Those who arrive by Wednesday afternoon will have the opportunity to attend three of four panels on language. The earliest is "Embodied Language, Participation and Learning in the Inhabited Lifeworld," organized by Marjorie H Goodwin and Lourdes de Leon, from 2–3:45 pm.

From 4–5:30 pm you can attend either "Using the Past to Explain the Present: How the Past Lives On through Linguistic Practice," organized by Er-Xin Lee, Elaine W Chun and Chiho Sunakawa, or "Socializing Politeness and Respect: Ideologies of Language, Hierarchy and Morality," organized by Adrienne Lo and Kathryn M Howard. If you can wait for a late dinner, you can also catch "Simple Measures, Complex Meanings: Linguistic Anthropologists Decode Standardized Learning Practices" by Leila Monaghan from 6–7:45 pm.

Thursday morning is crunch time for linguistic anthropology this year, with several important panels and events scheduled at the same time.

The SLA board meeting convenes at 7:00 am on Thursday. The linguistic anthropology poster session begins at 8:00 am, as does "Language, Culture and Education: Cases from Around the World," organized by Char Ullman.

All three of these will be competing against two stellar double sessions on our (sub)discipline's origins running from 8–11:45 am. The first is "Vestiges of the History of Subdisciplinary Creation: The Development of Areal Linguistic Science," organized by Lauren Keeler and featuring papers by Judith Irvine and Joel Kuipers, among others, and commentary by Michael Herzfeld, Talbot Taylor and Michael Silverstein. The second is an invited session of the General Anthropology Division entitled "Missionaries in the Development of Linguistic Anthropology and Ethnography," organized by Leonard Plotnicov and Vinson H Sutlive, and featuring papers by Susan Wadley and Nancy Lutkehaus, among many others.

After lunch, those seeking top-notch linguistic anthropology panels will again have to make a tough choice. The AAA Executive Program Committee's invited session "Purified Pasts, Hybrid Futures? (Meta)Languages of Science, Magic and Religion" was organized by Jim Wilce and Michael Silverstein, and features papers by Vincanne Adams, Richard Bauman, Charles L Briggs, Vincent Crapanzano and more. Unfortunately, it runs opposite the SLA invited session "Transcribing Now: Representations of Discourse in Anthropology," organized by Mary Bucholtz and John W Du Bois, and featuring an equally stellar cast including Dennis Tedlock, John B Haviland and Jan Blommaert.

Since there are no evening language panels, you have time to head for dinner with a friend who attended whichever session you couldn't, and share the high points. Don't linger too long, though. For our evening edification, Barbara LeMaster has organized a session on "Endangered World Languages: Sign Languages and their Variations" which will run from 7:45–9:30 pm.

And don't stay up too late. You need to get up early Friday to catch the 8:00 am SLA/GAD joint invited session "New Directions for Linguistic 'Tip': Individuals, Communities and 'Tip Back'," organized by Leanne Hinton and Jacqueline Messing. At 10:15 am we again have to choose between three excellent sessions on language. The first is the AAA Public Policy Forum on "Language and Social Justice," organized by Laura Graham, and featuring Jan Blommaert, Leanne Hinton, Ana C Zentella and others. The second is another SLA/GAD joint invited session, this one organized by Scott Kiesling on "Interactional Indirectness: Toward a More Inclusive Understanding of Contextualized Talk," including Deborah Tannen and Susan U Philips, with discussion by Michael Silverstein. Finally, there is the AAA Executive Program Committee's invited session on "Language Weapons Past and Present: Theory, Representation and Repercussions."

During lunch we can ponder the relationship of language and power, and then choose between three 1:45 pm sessions on the topic: "Endangered Languages and Linguistic Anthropology," organ-

ized by Tania Granadillo, "Identity Discourse and Practice in a Post-Colonial World: La Francophone, A Case in Point," organized by Kathleen Riley, and "Standardization of Language and Power Politics in Second-Language Education," organized by Neriko Doerr.

We can formally protest this frustrating scheduling at the SLA Business Meeting, from 6:15–7:30 pm, or we can wait and grumble over drinks at the cash bar and reception that follows.

Saturday gives us a chance to catch up on the other three subfields, since there seems to be only one language panel scheduled. That's the CAE invited session, entitled "Bridging Past and Present in Language Education—Language Ideologies in Practice," organized by Teresa L McCarty and Ofelia Zepeda.

Sunday language panels start with "The 21st Century Linguistic Anthropologist as Fieldworker," organized by Suzanne Wertheim and Jocelyn Ahlers. It runs until 11:45 am, so if you stay until the end you'll miss the 10:15–noon session on "Spatial Relationships in Oceania: Language, Mind and Culture," organized by Giovanni Bennardo with Ward Goodenough as discussant.

As always, all times and titles are subject to change. Check your program guide for details.

Please send your comments, contributions, news and announcements to SLA Contributing Editors Jim Stanlaw at stanlaw@ilstu.edu or Mark Peterson at petersm2@muohio.edu.

## Society for Medical Anthropology

JANELLE S TAYLOR, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

### Medical Anthropologists Speak Out on Katrina Disaster

SMA Statement Released September 13, 2005

SMA, the nation's largest organization of medical anthropologists, expresses its heartfelt concern and support to the victims of Hurricane Katrina. While the SMA recognizes that the disaster began as a natural event, it is clear to us that it rapidly became a human-made disaster of horrific proportions.

As medical anthropologists whose professional focus is understanding and improving human well-being, we conclude that the catastrophic extent of the damage was the result of inadequate planning and preparedness to meet a major natural disaster that had been predicted for years beforehand, and when it occurred, insufficient attention to and resources for many tens of thousands of people. These people—primarily poor, black, sick, in nursing homes, elderly, or disabled were not provided with basic human rights and essentials, such as clean water, food, medical care and decent shelter for days on end after the storm had ended. People died waiting for help that never came. Despite the billions of taxpayer dollars that have been spent in recent years on homeland security, weak links in the infrastructure of American cities

have been neglected, now with tragic results in New Orleans and the region. The vulnerability of New Orleans was widely known and generally ignored by those who hold responsibility to protect and serve the American people. The SMA recommends that officials at local, state and national levels, in combination with concerned citizens, assure that those at fault be subject to the full legal consequences. We also call for a national examination of the response failures, social and environmental vulnerabilities, and lack of compassion exposed by Hurricane Katrina, including the role of both active and passive racism and disregard for poor, aged, disabled and working people in this tragedy. The SMA urges our government to define homeland security in terms of adequate prevention as well as response, and to include all the American population, regardless of age, class and ethnicity, in its promise of security. The SMA asks our members and affiliates to consider the multiple ways that they may contribute to mitigating the cultural, social, economic and health effects of the disaster. It is critical that we, as a community of concerned scholars, committed to the relevance and applicability of our discipline, get involved. Such activities may involve donations, offers to house displaced students, faculty, researchers or practitioners, or volunteering in relief efforts.

### SMA Website Developments

By Lauren Wynne (U Chicago)

The SMA website ([www.medanthro.net](http://www.medanthro.net)) has some exciting new additions. We would like to request your assistance in building them: a *practicing medical anthropology* section that illustrates how anthropologists are contributing to medical and public health related research, care provision, evaluation and policy studies; an *ethnographic film* section that catalogues visual resources useful in teaching; an expanded *publication section*, please send book titles and links to published reviews; a *collaboration section* revised to provide a place to post opportunities for research internships; a *personal webpage database* to facilitate networking between scholars—please send us a link to your webpage; and a *travel* section for posting information about research-related travel and field survival tips.

We also need your help in keeping central areas of the website up to date. *News*, *conference announcements* and *job postings* are always welcome. Please send recent (last two years) *course syllabi*, and updates regarding *graduate programs*. Finally, we are still trying to reconstruct a comprehensive archive of *SMA history*. If you have served as SMA board member in the past, let us know when and in what position.

All of these initiatives need your support! Please check the site for the appropriate forms or just send an email to [webmaster@medanthro.net](mailto:webmaster@medanthro.net).

### RAI Honors SMA Career Achievement Award Recipient

Cecil Helman, who last year received the SMA's first Career Achievement Award, has been awarded the 2005 Lucy Mair Medal for Applied Anthropology by the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great



Cecil Helman

Britain and Ireland. This award is given "to recognize outstanding achievement in the application of anthropology to human wellbeing, with particular reference to the relief of poverty and suffering and the active recognition of human dignity." Congratulations, Helman!

Please send column contributions to the SMA Contributing Editor, Janelle Taylor at [jstaylor@u.washington.edu](mailto:jstaylor@u.washington.edu).

## Society for Psychological Anthropology

KATHLEEN BARLOW, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

### Exciting Annual Meeting Sessions

Thirteen sessions proposed by SPA are included in the program. Note especially the Business Meeting (6:15–7:30 pm) and cash bar (7:30–8:30 pm) open to all members on Friday evening! Plan to meet your colleagues there and participate in plans and decision-making about directions for SPA.

SPA is sponsoring two invited sessions that represent very well the theme of the meetings, "Bringing the Past into the Present." Thursday morning begins with the double session, "Uncanny Minds: Freud's Unheimlich, and Mental States, Medicines and Madness," organized by Sarah Pinto (Tufts) and Michael Oldani (Princeton). The second, a single session, "Localities and Subjectivities," co-organized by C Jason Throop (UCLA) and Kevin P Groark (UCLA) is on Saturday morning. For the first time we are offering an invited poster session jointly sponsored by SPA and the new unit EAS (Evolutionary Anthropology Society). Organized by Jim Boster (U Conn, Storrs), the posters will address "Morals and Mating: How Religions Regulate Sexuality and Negotiate Marriage Contracts."

"Voices and Visions," organized by Tanya Luhrmann (U Chicago), will use a unique format to explore the relationship between religious experience and psychiatric illness. Rebecca Lester (Wash U) will present a case study of a 19-year-old Postulant in a Roman Catholic convent in Mexico as a focal point. Panelists will consider interpretive frameworks and analytical approaches to understanding such phenomena as dissociative experiences, illness and spirituality.

A list of SPA section events at the AAA meetings including an index of terms indicating subjects/locales is posted on the SPA website.

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