



A child carries empty gas canisters on a tricycle to get on the waiting line for cooking gas in La Paz.

the sanctions and voted out of a sense of patriotism, or out a desire to complete the "social agenda" of October 2003.

The rank-and-file election officials, the people who ran the neighborhood polling places, were drawn at random from a list of registered voters. These random, unpaid, drafted officials showed up at 8:00 am on Sunday, in their winter coats, at voting places rigged up in schools all over Bolivia, handing out ballots, checking names against computer-generated lists of resident voters and dipping the tips of each voter's little finger in ink, so they could vote only once. Twenty-five polling places were even set up in jails and prisons, and some 4,000 prisoners voted (*La Razón*, July 19, 2004, page A15). For a country with a tradition of anarchy, voting was orderly. Only a few polling places failed to function. The drafted election officials counted the results by hand and phoned them in that same night. Although they are now being carefully recounted, the percentage of valid votes for "yes" were: repeal Goni's gas law 85%; nationalize oil and gas 91%; resurrect the national petroleum company 86%; use gas to regain an outlet to the Pacific 59%, export gas and industrialize it in Bolivia 68% (*Los Tiempos*, July 20, 2004, page A6).

The referendum was one of the first times that a population has voted on how to use a large-scale, natural resource. Much of the government's effort will no doubt go into using more gas locally. In the past several years many homes have already been hooked up with gas pipes from street to stove, and most of the buses and taxis are already converted from gasoline to gas. Perhaps the most important was the crucial fifth question, which got a "yes" among 71.8% of the urban voters, but only 45.2% of the rural ones (*La Razón* July 19, 2004, page A7). For the first time in a long time, the country was united behind one issue: oil and gas should be nationalized.

Jeffrey Bentley is an anthropologist working in Bolivia. He can be reached at Bentley@albatros.cnb.net, jefferywbentley@hotmail.com, or www.jefferybentley.com.

Please send articles and photos that could interest our readers to Gabriela Vargas-Cetina, Facultad de Ciencias Antropológicas, Universidad Autónoma de

Yucatán. Calle 76 #455-LL Mérida, Yucatán 97000, Mexico; gvcetina@tunku.uady.mx and gvargas@webtelmex.net.mx.

Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists

DAVID L R HOUSTON, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Back to School

Many readers are already "hip deep" in a flurry of syllabi, term papers and the myriad of parts that make a semester tick: we are engaged in the serious business of teaching students. How we teach is nearly as variable as the populations we address; the content we put in front of the student presents many challenges. How do we offer material that does not always sit well with students or administration?

Anthropologists-as-educators have the opportunity to put a perspective on the table that is often alien to students, provoking questions, challenges to authority, silence and even outrage. What can we do to introduce students to the world as seen through the lens of anthropology, providing not just new ideas, but a sense of balance and perspective, of critical questions? What, for example, might we tell students when the *Hindustan Times* reports that homosexuality is a punishable offense in 70 countries, that in nine of these it is punishable by death, when one or more of the students sitting in our classroom identifies as queer in some way? Can we foster a balanced discussion of why a major ally of the US in the Iraq conflict executed four individuals for the "crime" of homosexuality in 2002? What should we say in a discussion on US society about the changing nature of marriage when a powerful lobbying group such as the American Family Association is able to convince others that amending the constitution to prevent same-sex marriage is in the best interests of everyone? There are no pat, easy answers, but we can do something.

We can promote a sense of curiosity and openness, and encourage active, engaged scholarship. This can happen at the basic level of discussion, in the feedback we provide for students' research interests, and in actively encouraging a more open, public participation.

Payne and Benedict Prizes

SOLGA plays a part in this effort in several ways. The first is the annual Kenneth Payne student prize, awarded to an outstanding research paper by a graduate student with a focus in LGBTQ topics. First awarded in 1988, the Payne prize enjoys a long list of recipients (please visit www.solga.org for a complete listing). SOLGA also awards the annual Ruth Benedict prize for an outstanding book in an LGBTQ topic.

Both of these awards help send a message to our entire audience of undergraduate and graduate students alike: careful, well-balanced scholarship has many rewards. These may be simple financial awards (both offer a cash prize) or the larger reward of fostering public dialogue and

even greater awareness and tolerance. Our students see a visible, tangible reason for standing up and speaking out that works beyond the immediacy of the classroom or the pull of the letter grade. Active, engaging scholarship contributes to self and community. A dialogue that speaks and listens does much more than simply get an "A." Changing hearts and minds does happen, and sometimes it can happen because a very few are willing to have the courage to stand up and speak out. This is education, and this is learning, something we can give to our students.

The Year in Advance

What's ahead? This year's annual AAA meeting promises to provide a rich experience for dialogue and engaged scholarship. SOLGA is actively sponsoring sessions and roundtables and we welcome participation by all. This year's meeting schedule was not set at press time, but should be available when this issue of *AN* arrives in your mailbox. Both the SOLGA and the AAA websites provide details. There will be a continuation of the conversation on same-sex marriage at the annual meeting by way of a Presidential Roundtable discussion organized by SOLGA co-chairs Christa Craven and Jeff Maskovsky: "What's all the Fuss about Same Sex Marriage?" We encourage your attendance. Come share your thoughts with your peers about an important issue that promises to touch all of us in some way. Panelists include Ellen Lewin, Kate Kendall, Roger Lancaster and others.

Several new books are on the reading shelf. Look for reviews in future columns. Sandra Faiman-Silva published her ethnography of a Massachusetts town, *The Courage to Connect: Sexuality, Citizenship and Community in Provincetown*. Randy Conner and David Sparks have published *Queering Creole Spiritual Traditions*, an exploration of LGBTQ participation in African-inspired traditions in the Americas in 2004.

Please send any comments, suggestions, ideas for new columns or other material to David Houston at dlrh+an@uvm.edu.

Society for Linguistic Anthropology

JAMES STANLAW AND MARK PETERSON,
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Noam Chomsky On Language and Politics

By James Stanlaw

MIT professor Noam Chomsky is arguably the world's most influential linguist, a position he has held since the 1960s. His theory of transformational-generative grammar revolutionized all aspects of language study, from the way we view language acquisition and processing to theories of the mind. But he is also equally well-known as a political philosopher and activist, and outspoken critic of capitalism and US foreign policy. His numerous writings—he has at least 50 books, and



Noam Chomsky lectured on America's "Dilemmas of Dominance" at Illinois State last October.

those are just ones on my shelf—are evenly divided between language and politics.

Last October Chomsky visited Illinois State University as the Robert G Bone Distinguished Lecturer and spoke to a standing-room only crowd of over 2,000 people, from all over the Midwest, on America's "Dilemmas of Dominance." He also gave a press conference before his talk, and *Anthropology News* was there.

Chomsky has been cautious about positing close connections between his political beliefs and his work in linguistics, a relationship he has characterized as "tenuous" or "exaggerated in importance." When asked in the past about this he has said: "Scientific ideas and political ideas . . . should not be made to converge at the cost of distortion and suppression . . ." And when asked if there is a syntax of society, he claims "I do not think our capacities for having decent social relations, relations that would lead to some new form of society, would necessarily have the same structure as a generative grammar" (*Language and Politics*, pp 610, 143, 147).

That said, Chomsky's talk was much more political than linguistic. He argued that there are several dilemmas now facing the US as it continues with the war in Iraq and an increasingly more unilateral foreign policy. First, "controlling the domestic population . . . is not easy." The only way to "to get them to submit to policies that they basically oppose is to frighten them." "So you push the panic button" at every opportunity, increasing the national anxiety level. The second "dilemma is that they [the Bush administration] know perfectly well that the policies they are carrying out are increasing the threat of nuclear proliferation, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and also of terror." Rather than trying to make the world more internationally secure, "their higher priority is maintaining global dominance."

However, I think Chomsky is too wary in speculating how language and politics might be related. Much has been said about the Orwellian abuse of language, such as what defines "terrorism." But what Chomsky also talked about was the way national consent is manufactured in the "propaganda model" of how the media functions

to serve the agendas of privileged groups. This is done through tone, editorial stance, selective reporting and emphasis. The propaganda model is "too trivial to be called a theory. That's why we call it a model, because it is just ordinary common sense . . . It is one of the best established theses in the social sciences, which isn't surprising as it is a fairly obvious one." The actions of the current administration illustrates this "pretty dramatically": "Installing misperceptions into people's minds whipped [much of] the country into a kind of war fever."

Chomsky says this is the most important issue we need to face at the moment. "Most of the issues that become major scandals are, in my opinion, pretty minor, including Watergate, Iran-Contra, and so on . . . What should we address right now? . . . [The most important question that should be addressed is] how the United States population . . . was driven into a war-mongering hysteria by propaganda campaigns of quite unusual mendacity. This has led to a situation where the leadership—and by extension, the country—is becoming the object of fear and hatred around much of the world. How was that carried off, and for what reasons? Also, the media should be carrying out an investigation of themselves since they contributed to this."

But Chomsky knows, too, that simply blaming the media for carrying out the wishes of the Bush administration is much too simplistic. "I don't think the media are very different than the intellectual community . . . they are just easier to study . . . than faculty clubs." I asked Chomsky, then, if we professors are reneging our responsibilities: are we too complacent in accepting things in media; do we need to present a broader picture of things to our students? "That depends on your judgment as whether the things that are missing ought to be included. I think so; otherwise I wouldn't talk about them. You have to decide if it is important for students to know the kinds of things they feel they are missing. Personally, I obviously think they should . . . but that is for the faculty to decide."

Please send your comments, contributions, news and announcements to SLA contributing editors Jim Stanlaw (stanlaw@ilstu.edu) or Mark Peterson (petersm2@muohio.edu).

Society for Medical Anthropology

NANCY VUCKOVIC AND JANELLE TAYLOR,
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

State of the Society Address

By Craig Janes, SMA President

It is customary for the incoming president to offer a few comments on what they hope to accomplish during their term of office. Before doing so, I would like to acknowledge the substantial accomplishments of the two very active and forward-looking presidents that preceded

me—Bill Dressler and Mark Nichter. Both worked to solidify the position of the SMA within the AAA, and to link the SMA to organizations and groups outside of anthropology. I thus inherit an organization that is strong both organizationally and financially, active in terms of outreach and policy visibility, and productive in



Craig Janes

its contributions to the parent discipline. Much of what I will be doing as president will be to continue, expand or institutionalize many of the initiatives begun by Bill and Mark. We owe them a great many thanks for their efforts on our behalf.

Associations like the SMA have, in my view, two functions: building scholarly community and engaging that community constructively with other organizations, institutions and communities on topics of interest and concern. These two functions require separate activities. Building community is something that most of us, as anthropologists, understand and do reasonably well. It involves establishing effective and accessible means of communication for our members and building responsive leadership. As the SMA has grown in size and diversity of interests and occupational roles, communication needs have become more complex. To match this complexity the society has, and here I must acknowledge the formidable drive and energy of Mark Nichter, moved forward very quickly. Our website has developed rapidly, and has become an excellent resource for members. Recently the SMA joined H-Net, offering listserv opportunities to members, thus providing another important means of communication. Although I think all would agree that we have not fully realized the considerable potential offered by these new modes of interaction, over time website and Internet-based communications will become more established, and more integral, to the functioning of the SMA. Our goal should be to make sure that we continue to work to ensure that the website and H-Net Medanthro are kept relevant to the needs of the majority of members. The SMA will need to formalize, and fund, the position of a web and list manager with authority equivalent to the editors of the MAQ and our news column in AN. This is something I hope, with Board support, to accomplish over the next year.

Although we have made great progress in building our internal communication structures, our progress toward engaging the SMA with broader publics is still in its infancy. The SMA "Takes a Stand" initiative, begun by Mark Nichter, is a promising step in this direction. Our first initiative, focusing on the ethics of clinical trials in global context, and led by Kate McQueen, was successful, resulting in a session organized at the 2004 SFAA meeting in Dallas. The next step is to move these papers and presentations out of the anthropology arena and