



## SECTION NEWS

Recognizing that the association's sections represent the rich diversity of the discipline's subfields, *AN* includes Section News, which provides news of specific relevance to members of each section (eg, summaries of section business meetings, section meeting presentations, section-featured annual meeting lectures). Members are encouraged to make full use of other *AN* editorial sections to report items of more general interest (eg, meeting dates, death notices, commentaries). Contact information for section contributing editors is available in individual columns.

## American Ethnological Society

JOANNA DAVIDSON, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

The AES board is in the midst of organizing several programs for the 2008-09 academic year. First, AES has selected 33 panels as invited sessions for the AAA meeting in November. Many of these are co-sponsored with other AAA sections. Invited panels include "New Landscapes of American Inequality"; "On the Edge of the Dream: Narratives of Arrival and Foreclosure"; "War, Debt and Charity"; "Global Comings of Age: Elders, Generations and Late Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" and "Civilizing Children: The Last Primitives?" among others. A complete list of AES invited sessions can be found on the AES website: [www.aesonline.org](http://www.aesonline.org).

### Spring Conference

AES and the Canadian Anthropology Society (CASCA) are co-hosting our annual spring conference at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, May 13-16, 2009. The conference theme is "Transnational Anthropologies: Convergences and Divergences in Globalized Disciplinary Networks." Conference organizers Jacqueline Solway and Gaston Gordillo state:

In an era when anthropology is increasingly attentive to transnational connections, globalized geographies, and diasporic identities, the discipline itself is subject to new and challenging forms of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Anthropology has long been constituted by tensions between the gravitational force of its various national traditions and the pull toward an international intellectual cosmopolitanism. Yet the increasing presence of scholars from the world 'periphery' in metropolitan universities, the rise to international prominence of subaltern academic centers, the deterritorialized concerns and priorities of funding institutions, and the growing transnational links between researchers, research institutions, and research subjects (among other factors) are further complicating the spatiality of anthropological practice. These shifts, in turn, are transforming the way anthropologists examine the production of power relations, inequalities, and identities in local and global arenas. The 2009 CASCA-AES confer-

ence calls anthropologists and scholars from across the social sciences and the humanities to offer a fresh look at the increasingly transnational nature of knowledge production, at the resilience of regionalized academic hierarchies, as well as at the different ways in which the latter are being reconstituted and subverted. Additionally, the conference welcomes submissions related to the internationalization of social practices, power relations, and subjectivities and to any other theme associated with ongoing anthropological questions.

Registration for the conference will begin in early fall through the AES website.

### Book Prizes

After a one-year hiatus, AES will resume its book prizes. The awards go to works that speak to contemporary social issues with relevance beyond the discipline and the academy. Ethnographies and critical works in contemporary theory—single-authored or multi-authored, but not edited collections—are eligible. There are two separate competitions for the book prizes: the Sharon Stephens prize is given for a junior scholar's first book and the Senior Book Prize recognizes a work by a senior scholar. The prizes will be awarded in alternate years, starting with the Sharon Stephens prize in 2009, which will include books published during the previous two years. Please see the AES website for more detailed information and submission guidelines.

*If you have comments about this column or items and ideas for future columns, please send them to Joanna Davidson ([jhd@emory.edu](mailto:jhd@emory.edu)).*

## Anthropology and Environment Section

Laura Ogden, Contributing Editor

In this lively column, James Holland Jones and Rebecca Bliege Bird call for an environmental anthropology that seeks to understand the rationality of decision-makers, while underscoring that "rational choice" may not align with neoclassical economic principles of maximization. The authors are core faculty in Stanford University's new PhD program in Ecological and Environmental Anthropology.

## In Defense of Functionalism

By James Holland Jones (Stanford U) and Rebecca Bliege Bird (Stanford U)

The well-justified critique of the neoclassical "rational actor," along with actual failures of economic theory to predict human behavior, has led most contemporary ecological anthropologists to abandon the idea of rationality as an engine of human action. Political ecology, the currently dominant approach to environmental anthropology, has apparently settled on describing constraints on human agency while neglecting to explain the actual agency itself. Few anthropologists intentionally suggest that people behave irrationally, but our unwillingness to attribute rationality to people's decision-making creates a vacuum wherein strictly neoclassical economic ideas define what is and what is not rational. In the larger arena of development and government policy, people who do not behave by such expectations are therefore, by default, "irrational." The diagnosis of irrationality paves the road to paternalism. The stigma associated with "irrationality" can cause marginalized people to be further marginalized and fail to realize the benefits of even well-intentioned projects.

In our rush to document the injustices attendant to colonialism and globalization on indigenous people's sovereignty, anthropologists seem to have forgotten that people adapt. That is, people often make sensible decisions about the necessities of daily life, as individuals and as collectives, given the social and ecological constraints within which their decisions are made. These decisions may be a poor fit to predictions of rational actor models that assume *a priori* the "objective function" agents attempt to maximize. The failure of a model of resource management predicated upon the assumption that individuals are attempting to maximize the long-term value of some harvest may arise because decisions are shaped more by short-term tradeoffs than by long-term goals. Trading off short-term benefits against future losses may be adaptive if an actor thinks it unlikely that she will live long enough or be healthy enough to reap the benefits of longer range planning. The vicious cycle of deforestation from unsustainable firewood extraction, soil erosion, declining agricultural productivity and vulnerability to flooding in varied localities such as Haiti or arid Africa exemplify this process. Such seeming "irrationality" cuts both ways. A group may choose to preserve a resource when the optimal economic action is to liquidate because the resource is deemed to have value beyond economics.

The research model we describe avoids the excesses of functionalism past, especially the Panglossian idea that culture is itself necessarily an adaptation. Culture is an amalgam of behaviors and institutions that represent responses to both past and present environments, both real and imagined. It is composed of the thoughts and actions of agents whose contexts, constraints and goals vary. Herein lies the second source of

many failures to fit “rational” choice models: individual heterogeneity means that adaptation is not an absolute criterion. Adaptation is a local, not global, process. For example, there is no single optimal family size, but an average family size emerges from the decision-making of individual women spacing births in response to local social, ecological, economic and political conditions and subject to the constraints imposed on their decision-making. Of course, even in local contexts, some individuals or populations are better adapted than others, but the question of why adaptations vary from one locality to another is just as important as the question of how well people are adapted.

Rather than presuming to know *a priori* the objective function that agents attempt to maximize, the objective function itself becomes a testable hypothesis. This is where core methods of ecology and political economy enter the research process. By positing multiple goals and testing the fit between the model and observed behavior, we create alternative constructions of rationality that better represent the actual adaptive decision-making processes individuals employ.

To make scientific judgments about adaptation, we need to measure things, preferably things that can be measured by others working with different people or at different times. Some natural outcomes to measure, depending upon the question at hand, include: productivity, energy flux, weight-for-height, nutritional status, household wealth and social networks. In a practical sense, this may mean abandoning the tradition of the lone anthropologist working in isolation. We think that anthropologists are capable of working in multidisciplinary teams and that science would benefit from such integration.

The study of variation, clearly at the heart of anthropology, takes on a new urgency in a world increasingly homogenized by global capital, where solutions to grave problems may lie in local adaptations. We see it as incumbent upon ecological anthropologists to reclaim the concept of rationality as seen through the lens of ecological adaptation. To do this, we must move beyond simply describing constraints people face and attempt to explain the agency and, yes, rationality of people trying to subsist in a world in which power and resources are unequally distributed.

Please contact Laura Ogden at [laura.ogden@fiu.edu](mailto:laura.ogden@fiu.edu) to discuss column ideas or submit contributions.

## Archeology Division

RANI T ALEXANDER, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

### Barbara Voss Wins 2008 Gordon R Willey Award

By Ben Nelson, AD President-Elect

The AD is pleased to announce Barbara Voss (Stanford U) is the recipient of the 2008 Gordon R Willey award for her article “From

Casta to California: Social Identity and the Archaeology of Culture Contact,” published in *American Anthropologist* 107(3). The Willey award recognizes outstanding archaeological writing that contributes to anthropological research published in *American Anthropologist*.

In this article, Voss brings archaeology to life in a way once described by Gordon Willey



Barbara Voss

as “the imaginative recapture of the past within the hard boundaries of the evidence.” She examines how material change in the Presidio de San Francisco, a fortress founded in 1776 during the Spanish colonization of California, reflects the shifting social identities of the agents of colonization. Early artifacts, representing the diverse origins of the initial colonists in different parts of Mexico, reflect a range of sources and traditions. During several rebuilding episodes the compound became less heterogeneous in building materials and styles. The increasing architectural homogeneity over time is consistent with the principle that ethnicity is culturally constructed to mark social categories for political purposes; in so doing it may minimize differences under terms such as “colonist” and “colonizer.” The “Spanish” soldiers were from a variety of places in Mexico, but when classed in contrast to local indigenous people, their practices became increasingly homogenized to bring their identities in line with the colonial government’s portrayal of them as one group.

The Willey award carries a \$1000 prize and will be presented at the annual business meeting of the AD on the evening of Friday, November 21, 2008.

### 2008 Archeology Division Election Results

The AD is grateful to all archaeology nominees who ran for office. Welcome to the new officers: AD Secretary James M Skibo, AD Member-at-Large Jason Yaeger, AD Student Member-at-Large Erika Sabine Roberts and AD Nominations Committee Chair Teresita Majewski. Congratulations! We’d also like to report that the bylaws amendments passed.

### 2008 Spring Business Meeting Recap

The 2008 spring AD Executive Committee (EC) meeting took place 8:00 am–noon on March 28 at the annual meeting of the Society for American Archaeology in Vancouver, Canada. Present were Janet Levy, Ben Nelson, Andrew Roddick, Rani Alexander, Lisa Frink, Randolph Widmer, Steve Silliman, Minette Church, Teresita Majewski and Robert Paynter.

Archaeologists serving on other AAA committees attended relevant parts of the meeting. The AD EC met with Deborah Nichols (AAA Executive Board), Alex Barker (AAA Committee on Ethics), Katherine Spielmann (AAA Executive Board), Diane Gifford-González (AAA Long Range Planning Committee), Sandra López Varela (AAA Long Range Planning Committee),

Beverley Chiarulli (AAA Anthropology and Education Committee) and Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh (AAA Committee on Practicing, Applied and Public Interest Anthropology).

President-Elect Ben Nelson presented the finalists and selection criteria for the 2008 Gordon R Willey Award. By a vote of the entire AD EC, Barbara Voss was selected as the 2008 recipient. The AD EC also confirmed the Kidder Award Committee’s selection of David Grove as the recipient of the 2008 Alfred Vincent Kidder Award for Eminence in the Field of American Archaeology.

President Janet Levy discussed ongoing work on AAA governance and the Section Assembly, the Willey endowment, the AD’s external relations and recent proposals of the AAA Committee on Ethics. Robert Paynter and Terry Majewski (AD Nominations Committee) presented and ranked the candidates for open AD and AAA positions for the 2009 elections. Paynter reported that for the 2008 elections, the AD sent 11 names to the AAA Nominations Committee for consideration for AAA positions, and six of our proposed candidates were nominated by the AAA Nominations Committee.

AD Treasurer Randolph Widmer reported that the AD’s finances remain strong. Membership decline continues to be our chief concern. Lisa Frink, Program Committee Chair, reported that the upcoming membership count would indicate our numbers had increased, which would help secure the space for sessions allocated to the AD at the annual meeting. We discussed future selections of the AD Distinguished Lecture and how they might enhance the AAA’s international position.

AD Publications Director Cathy Costin discussed the AP3A publication pipeline and the allocation of revenues and changes to publication specifications under the Wiley Blackwell contract. The AD EC voted unanimously to accept Graciela Cabana (U Tennessee-Knoxville) and Jeffrey Clark’s (Center for Desert Archaeology-Tucson) prospectus, *Current Developments in the Anthropological Study of Past Human Migration*, and Kenneth Hirth’s (Pennsylvania State U) prospectus, *Housework: Craft Production and Domestic Economy in Mesoamerica*, for future AP3A volumes.

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## Association for Africanist Anthropology

JENNIFER E COFFMAN, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

### AfAA at the 2008 AAA Meeting

With Bennetta Jules-Rosette, AfAA President

AfAA events during the 2008 AAA Annual Meeting in San Francisco promise to be very