

Analysis, Application, and Anthropology: The Omer C. Stewart Memorial Award

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Of course it is a great honor to receive the Omer C. Stewart Memorial Award, especially since Omer Stewart, Deward Walker, Michael Higgins and myself talked long and often about the feasibility of establishing a regional group of practicing anthropologists.

May I now share with you some of the ideas that shaped not only my interest in applied anthropology but also taught me what to do in applied situations and what not to do? As a graduate student at the University of Chicago, I had learned the importance of analyzing a socio-cultural system such as a tribe. Indeed, my first field work with my wife and two children in the summer of 1950 was with the Northern Utes in northeastern Utah. After the usual difficulties of establishing rapport, they eventually asked me to help out with this or that project. I felt very inadequate and wrote to Redfield at Chicago for advice. When he answered our letter, we were disappointed because he said that he could not help us. However, he said the Department at Chicago was developing an applied course which, a year later, became Tax's "Action Anthropology."

One of the factions of the Utes asked us if we could demonstrate to the Salt Lake City newspapers that they were not wealthy as asserted, in spite of their pending multimillion dollar claim with the recently established Indian Claims Commission. We accepted the invitation and constructed a survey of the three Ute bands, including the so called "mixed blood" population. We demonstrated, among other things, that the Utes were poor in housing, education, and nutrition. Over a period of four years, the last of which lasted nearly a calendar year, I naively assumed that quantitative data would eliminate different interpretations of the ethnographic "reality." Partially, my interest in quantitative research was an outcome of my familiarity with numbers, since my bachelor's degree was in engineering. That was also my handicap: engineers have a tendency to know answers to a problem after an initial survey has been made. In addition to our survey, we did participant observation at the sun dances, peyote meetings, bear dances, the meetings of the

tribal business committee, and the gatherings at the gambling grounds. Our survey results were appreciated even by the originally ambivalent tribal administrators. However, our suggestion on how the recently awarded grant of several million dollars for lost treaty lands in western Colorado should be spent was not accepted.

Even though our relationships with the Tribal Manager and the Business Committee over the years became more and more cooperative, I in particular failed to listen to what the rank and file members of the three bands and the "mixed bloods" were saying about the disposal of the money. In any event, the disposal of the money was circumscribed by BIA regulations. We thought that the problem was to find ways to adapt the BIA regulations. Many of the Utes wanted per capita payments.

Trying to be scientists, we thought of our work as collecting objective data. We then would proceed to an analysis of data. This meant moving from concrete data to abstract relationships not necessarily shared by the study population. We had to take a complex living socio-cultural domain apart. Thus the scientific method would allow us to find mechanisms which make the socio-cultural system work. Indeed, systems analysis is the logical or natural consequence of a search for relationships and mechanisms of stability and change.

Much later in our career we learned that this method was not enough and certainly not that mechanical. It was the application of anthropological principles that made us realize that from the very beginning of field work one not only has to learn to be "objective," but especially sympathetic, and compassionate. Now, at this stage in our development as anthropologists, we feel that applied anthropology has brought us into contact with real people, not just with abstractions about people. Applied anthropology has been a good antidote to getting stuck at the level of analysis. What applied anthropology has taught us, and hopefully we have learned, was to understand that people think and how they view their lives and the lives of others, and how much their history influences their thoughts and behavior. We have learned, in our recent research, that

[in] the village of my birth, which was torn by factionalism, that the villagers have “buried the hatchet” in order to pull together and produce a new version of the Passion Play of Oberammergau. We did not expect this. If our predictions do not come true, we must remind ourselves that much of what we plan may not materialize even after we have discovered common patterns. After all, individuals can change as their physical, cultural, social, political, and economic situation changes. Each, including the anthropologist, tends to see situations differently. As a people, a tribe, a village, a nation, or conglomerates of nations adapt to or fail to adapt, we must not be innocent bystanders, but do our part to help in creatively finding solutions to old and new problems. Also, we have discovered that

changes made at the local level are not infrequently nullified by connections to the larger society and the world.

Even after a most thoughtful and thorough analysis there are surprises, because humankind can be creative in peace and in conflict. Sometimes I get depressed by the national in international crises, not to mention the local scene. On the other hand, I am optimistic of humankind’s ability to meet these crises. Our task, it seems to me, is to be optimistic, provided we view our efforts with great humility, aware of our limitations, and realizing that we, too, are members of the species *homo sapiens*.