

Editorial: The First 50 Years

In this issue we celebrate 50 years of *Current Anthropology*. By no means the most long-lived anthropology journal (that honor must go to the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, which technically began its run in 1872 but whose origins can be traced to 1863), it is certainly unique. The six celebratory essays explore the history of this remarkable journal from the perspectives of past editors, beginning with Cyril Belshaw, who took over from Sol Tax, the journal's founder, and then Adam Kuper, Richard Fox, and Ben Orlove, as well as two past presidents of the Wenner-Gren Foundation, Sydel Silverman and Richard Fox. Barbara Metzger, who joined the journal as a copy editor in 1964 at Tax's behest and became arguably the central figure of the journal through the terms of five editors, provides another perspective on *CA*'s evolution. These very personal reflections offer us insights into not only the history of the journal but also the changing nature of scholarly publishing and the ways in which *CA* shaped, and was shaped by, the contours of these changes.

Reading through the essays, I was struck by three themes that have defined the past of the journal and will figure prominently in its continuing evolution: its worldwide scope, the insistence upon publishing the "current," and concerns about access and affordability. Sol Tax envisioned a world community of anthropologists and worked tirelessly to create an organizational structure to accommodate this vision, eventually settling upon the journal format as the best way to accomplish it. Each of our essayists writes that maintaining the international scope of *CA* figured among their top priorities, but it is clear that the journal remains strongly anglophone in authorship despite their best efforts. Why has it been so difficult to broaden the authorship of the journal? Four factors seem pertinent: the explosion of publishing venues in the field since 1960 (more competition for authors even for the best journals), increasing interdisciplinary specialization (specialist journals are thus more appealing), English as the language of *CA* (as many of our essayists noted, this has been a recurring problem), and different intellectual traditions and perspectives on peer review (standards of what comprises quality work vary, and often this comes as an unwelcome surprise to many authors). Lasting solutions to this dilemma remain elusive, but my editorial team will continue to work to bring voices from across the world to our pages.

Although Sol Tax first saw *CA* as a venue for reviews and news, the realities of scholarly publishing even then moved him toward a broader conception of the idea of "current" research. Over the decades, as our editors have stressed, cur-

rent meant just that—publishing not just the new for the sake of newness and currency but also the best of that research. Here the journal over the decades has been tremendously successful. Although I am aware of dissatisfaction with and rejection of quantitative measures of journal impact, such measures are nevertheless one way to document the quality of a journal and its influence on a field. Using the Institute for Scientific Information's impact factor formula as reported in their annual *Journal Citation Reports* (see <http://tinyurl.com/ygvxqq> for definitions and caveats), since 1997, *CA* has ranged from the first to the seventh position of all indexed anthropology journals (lower numbers are better). This is a remarkable achievement for a four-field journal in an era of increasing specialization, and the past editors must be heartily congratulated for keeping *CA* timely, relevant, and important to the field across these five decades. For the sake of modesty, I will forgo comparisons with the other two major four-field journals!

CA was meant to reach far and to be read widely. In the early days, this was achieved by generous subsidies from the Wenner-Gren Foundation (a tradition I am pleased to say continues today) and the efforts of the University of Chicago Press to keep subscription costs as low as possible. Although costs have inevitably risen, *CA* remains one of the most affordable anthropology journals, and with the advent of the "electronic edition" implemented by Richard Fox in 2000, it is one of the most accessible journals as well. Large numbers of our subscribers get the journal in only digital form. And consistent with Sol Tax's desire to broaden access, the journal is made available for free to more than 1,000 institutions in developing nations through the Chicago Emerging Nations Initiative.

I won't try to predict the future, but I will say with all confidence that *CA* is well positioned for the next 50 years due to the efforts of my predecessors. I thank them, as should you, for creating and nurturing into maturity one of the premier journals in the field.


