

# The First 50 Years

## Covering Anthropology

Ben Orlove

(E-mail: bsorlove@ucdavis.edu) 23 VIII 09

Placing the first issue of *Current Anthropology* next to the most recent issue provides a view of the journal's history, now half a century long. To be sure, the familiar adage about not judging books by their covers might easily be extended to journals; this corollary would suggest that a comparison of the covers would be a trivial exercise. The cover might be taken literally as the most superficial aspect of a journal. For most readers, it is distinct from what are—literally, once again—the contents of the journal. The cover lists the titles of the papers in a specific issue; the pages that lie inside it contain the papers themselves, in which the empirical and theoretical contributions that mark advances in anthropology can be found. Nonetheless, an examination of the history of the cover may be particularly appropriate for *Current Anthropology*. From its inception, the journal has published papers that examine both the material and the symbolic aspects of objects made by humans, in contexts that stretch from our evolutionary past and prehistory to historical times and the present.

The first impression when looking at the oldest and the newest covers is of the differences between them. The older cover has a dull matte finish and a plain light gray color, while the newer cover is shiny and a distinctive shade of blue. A closer inspection reveals some striking elements of continuity. Among these is the name of an institution, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, that has appeared at the bottom of the cover of every issue. Since its inception, the journal has received generous, steady support from the foundation. As a result, it has been able to maintain existing sections and to develop new ones, and to reach readers at affordable prices.

Starting in 1971, the cover has contained the name of a second institution, the University of Chicago Press. Before that, the manuscript editing and preparation and other publishing tasks were carried out in the basement of Haskell Hall at the University of Chicago, the building where the Department of Anthropology was housed, and the printing was done first at Donnelly in Chicago and then at MacLehose in Glasgow. In 1971, the journal shifted to the University of Chicago Press, which has maintained standards of the highest level in editing, production, and distribution. This long institutional

tie, now nearly four decades long, has been a crucial element in the journal's quality.

Another element of continuity is the journal's title itself. Sol Tax, the journal's founding editor, had at one time considering using *Humana* as the title of a projected international journal that would build on the successes of the *Yearbook of Anthropology*, but he soon settled on the title that is now in use (Tax 1965, 242). The word "current" reflects his concern to address the new developments in the rapidly changing field of anthropology; in his view, the problem with the annual publication cycle of *Yearbook of Anthropology* was not so much the limited number of pages that it contained but the delays in reaching readers. His choice of adjective was forward-looking. *Current Anthropology* was among the first journals to use "current" in its title. The online database Web of Science, which contains the Internet's largest set of articles in academic journals, lists 96 journals whose titles begin with this adjective; less than 10% were founded before 1970, and the majority began publication after 1990.

Through 1986, the cover also contained the subtitle "A World Journal of the Sciences of Man." The use of the word "man" as a generic term for human beings had come under strong question in that decade, and the subtitle was dropped. In more recent years, the word "sciences" has also become controversial as the distinctive status and authority of scientific inquiry and knowledge have come into question. People within and outside anthropology do not always agree which is the most appropriate location for the discipline—the natural sciences, the social sciences, or the humanities—or whether portions of anthropology might be distributed among these scholarly domains. These discussions often bring to my mind the debates among natural historians and collectors in Europe between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries about coral. They could not agree whether it was a plant, a mineral, or an animal (Smith 1992, 29, 216); some, struck by the difficulty of classifying it, suggested that it was "a joke of nature" (Findlen 1990). (In the nineteenth century, scientists established that reef-building corals are colonial animals; later work showed that they excrete minerals and live symbiotically with algae, which carry out photosynthesis. This unique combination of the three natural realms might suggest the possibility of considering anthropology to be not a simple example of an established category but, rather, a unique combination of several elements—in this case, of the three distinct scholarly domains.)

Another word in the subtitle, "world," is also worthy of attention, since it shows the journal's commitment, continuing to the present, to include anthropology from every part of the globe. Though the word "international" is more often used in journal titles to suggest this scope, Tax made considerable effort to assure that the new journal would create "a community of individual scholars" rather than an association of "national groups" (Tax 1965, 242), and his choice of term is consistent with this goal. In discussing the history of the



Figure 1. Map that appeared on the cover of *Current Anthropology* from 1959 to 1987.

journal, he spoke of his “strong and optimistic belief in humanity, community and democracy” (242), and he invited participation from anthropologists and specialists in related fields, not as members of national associations but in a more open and unstructured manner, as fellow associates. He stated, “The decision to publish *Current Anthropology* in a single language, English, was reached . . . only after long discussion of the alternatives. We reluctantly concluded that publication in one language was essential and that English was the most widely known” (Tax 1959, 3). Other articles in this special issue offer full accounts of the efforts that Tax made to reach out around the world; confined as I am in this present context to the covers, I can only mention that inside covers of early issues offered instructions to authors in many languages—Arabic, Chinese, Czech, French, German, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, and Spanish. This range of languages deserves some attention. When the discussions about the journal began in the 1950s, these languages could still be seen as a sign of the widespread postwar inter-

nationalism that gave rise to the United Nations—an internationalism that was part of the hope for a world free from nuclear war and that was marked by a recognition of shared humanity (the Family of Man photographic exhibit of the mid-1950s, with its strong international and anthropological character, was a high point of this impulse [Stimson 2006]); when *Current Anthropology* published instructions in Russian and Chinese in the early 1960s, after the Berlin Wall had gone up, these languages suggested an opposition to political forces that sought to limit scholarly exchanges in the Cold War period.

Tax saw a connection between the temporal concern for newness and the spatial concern for a global scale. In the inaugural issue, he wrote, “We hope to arrange to send *Current Anthropology* by air to . . . Asia, Africa, Oceania and South America, so that all of us will receive it within the same ten days” (Tax 1959, 3). His statement suggests the rapidity of technological change. What seemed fast to him would strike many readers as slow. Indeed, the journal now reaches many



Figure 2. Map that appears on the flag of the United Nations.

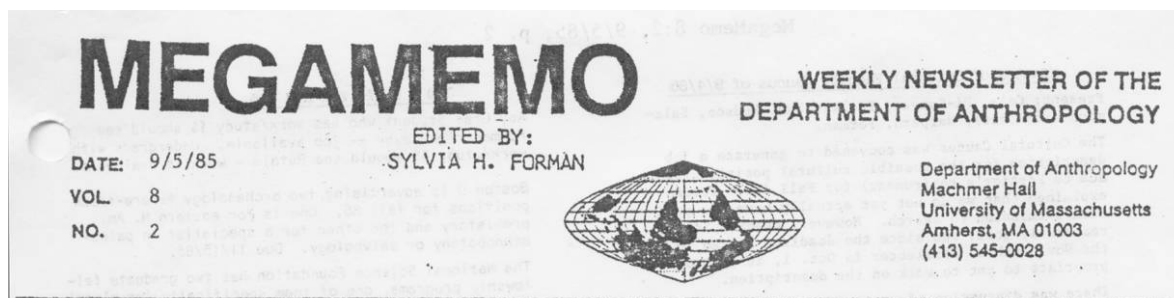


Figure 3. Map that appeared on the cover of *Megamemo*.

readers in electronic form before any copies come off the press at all. And yet this change is also a sign of continuity. The journal's efforts to promote electronic access—the most rapid means of communication at present—is connected to the global reach of the journal. The electronic edition has been especially important in developing countries, where print copies of the journal are often difficult to obtain.

A final element of this global scale is visual. In the first issue, Tax wrote, "Please notice the design on the front cover; this may become the symbol of *Current Anthropology*, showing as it does the whole world and also the spectrum of the sciences of anthropology" (1959, 3). The spectrum of sciences that he mentioned comprised ethnology, social anthropology, physical anthropology, folklore, linguistics, archaeology, and prehistory, fields whose names encircled a design. The design was a map of the world, in a projection that formed an ellipse (fig. 1). The continents appeared in the same light shade of gray as the cover, with the oceans in the soft orange-brown color. Perhaps the absence of lines that indicate national borders was a reference, conscious or unconscious, to this community of individuals rather than an association of nations. This elliptical map resembles another well-known round world map at the time, the emblem of the United Nations

(fig. 2), adopted in 1946, which uses an azimuthal projection, centered on the North Pole.

The world map indeed became the symbol of the journal, and it has continued to the present. The map was so familiar to anthropologists that it could be used informally and even ironically. In the pre-Internet years of the late 1970s and the 1980s, the Department of Anthropology at the University of Massachusetts mimeographed and distributed a multipage weekly newsletter titled *Megamemo* to faculty, staff, and graduate students. It reflected the open, informal, and egalitarian tone of the department and the era; for example, the description of the organization of the department office listed the staff employees and professors assigned to each task by first name only. Sylvia Forman took the position of chair of the department in 1984 and simultaneously began her editorship of the newsletter. Her decidedly antihierarchical spirit and her commitment to social justice—sentiments that were widely shared in anthropology at the time—were evident in the newsletter (the second issue in 1985 reported that the university administration had issued a regulation not to serve "booze" at campus functions because of liability issues and offered the wish that this annoying rule would soon be lifted; the section on personal news contained stories about both married and



Figure 4. Map that appeared on the cover of *Current Anthropology* from 1988 to 2005.



Figure 5. Map that has appeared on the cover of *Current Anthropology* since 2006.

unmarried partners of department members) and also in her choice of the visual symbol that appeared on the first page: a map that would evoke the *Current Anthropology* map of the world (fig. 3), inverted so that the south was at the top. This image was intended to suggest a reversal of colonialism in the world, much as the use of first names and the consumption of alcohol reduced social hierarchies in the department.

A somewhat less dramatic anticolonial gesture appeared on the cover of the journal itself. In 1988, there was a shift to a different projection. A number of people, including Adam Kuper, the editor at the time and a South African by birth, were concerned that the original map used a projection that showed Europe and North America as disproportionately large in relation to Africa and South America. The new map—retaining the elliptical shape, now enclosed within a rectangle (fig. 4)—reduced this imbalance.

The late 1980s also marked other shifts in the cover. For the journal's first 27 years, the typeface had been a modern serif style, and the cover had been a light gray. In 1987, in the same spirit of renewal that would lead to the change of map in 1988, it shifted to a heavier slab serif typeface and a new color—a light blue, very close to the hue of the United Nations flag. This shade continued for two volumes. The cover then began changing its color every year (with yellow in 1989, orange in 1990, gray in 1991, blue-green in 1992, and yellow in 1993), with the idea of making each volume easily recognizable when the issues were shelved in bookcases, before shifting back to United Nations blue in 1994, a color that remained through 2005. In 2006, the journal shifted to a purplish gray-blue. In that year, the map changed as well. A third projection, close to the second, was used; it dropped Antarctica (which had been a narrow band at the bottom of the first two maps) and, more important, increased greatly

in size. Printed in black, the map served as a background against which the table of contents of each issue was printed in white (fig. 5). This was also the year that the table of contents was printed in a sans serif typeface, and the slab serif of the journal title was replaced with a modern serif style. I wrote in an editorial at the time, "Changes in style on the cover and throughout are aimed at giving the journal a fresher, more engaging look" (Orlove 2006, 1). These changes reflect the wish that the design of the cover, like the contents of the journal itself, would remain current. Even as the appearance of the journal changes, its title and its symbol continue, showing its commitment to bringing anthropologists around the world into a single community.

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