

AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF ANTHROPOLOGY

by **ROB BOROFSKY**

ENDORSEMENTS BY

35 PROMINENT ANTHROPOLOGISTS FROM

AUSTRALIA, CANADA, FRANCE, NORWAY, UNITED KINGDOM, and UNITED STATES

Anthropology as a discipline should have far greater impact on the world today, both in its elucidation of the nature of humanity, and its application to specific human needs. To this end, Borofsky provides a trenchant critique of current ideology and practice in anthropology. In calling for increased attention to Public Anthropology, he explains why anthropologists have not fulfilled their promise in improving the human understanding and the human condition. This book is both an incisive critique of anthropology and a call for action. It should be widely read and taken to heart.

WILLIAM O. BEEMAN, Co-President of the Association for the Anthropology of Policy;
Professor of Anthropology, University of Minnesota

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Borofsky's call for a public anthropology with real human, political and intellectual stakes is inspiring. His rich documentation of the history of anthropology and his critique of the propensity for elite academics to pursue irrelevant trendy theory that advances careers instead of useful, knowledge helpful to the people anthropologists study is right on point. Please read this book and engage with the world on behalf of social justice.

PHILIPPE BOURGOIS, Director of the Center for Social Medicine and Humanities,
UCLA; Author of *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio* and *Righteous
Dopefiend*

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This book is a timely call to action for all of us who want to see anthropology become a discipline that engages the public and does good in the world. Please read it; please teach it to your students!

NINA BROWN, Professor of Anthropology, Community College of Baltimore County-
Essex; Editor, *Anthropology of Work Review*; Co-Editor, *Perspectives: An Open
Invitation to Cultural Anthropology*

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An Anthropology of Anthropology is a work of clarity and impressive scholarship. It makes a powerful case for anthropologists to contribute, and to look for validation, beyond their narrow professional world. In fact, Borofsky's argument for a public anthropology which aims not just to do no harm, but positively to benefit others, could be read with profit by any social scientist, and especially by those who now feel themselves trammelled by the inward turn toward theory which presently dominates so much of social science. I very much hope the book reaches a wide audience.

MICHAEL CARRITHERS, Fellow of the British Academy; Professor of Anthropology,
Durham University

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Never has the time been as ripe for anthropologists, both as scholars and citizens, to turn their unique human, humane insight toward urgent public issues in our world. Seldom has the case for such a turn been as boldly or persuasively made as in this book.

JEAN COMAROFF, Alfred North Whitehead Professor of African and African American
Studies and of Anthropology, Harvard University

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Robert Borofsky's book is an invitation to dialogue on some of the most vexing issues on the place of anthropology as disciplinary knowledge and as practice in the first half of the twenty-first century. Passionate in its advocacy for making anthropology open to other disciplines, it should inspire a debate that goes beyond narrow preoccupations of the increasing tendency to accommodate to an accounting culture and its application of neoliberal models to the production of knowledge.

VEENA DAS, Krieger-Eisenhower Professor of Anthropology, Johns Hopkins University

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It is hard to take the 'publish or perish' model of academic anthropology seriously these days when the actual lives of many of the people that we work with around the globe are at stake. Borofsky provides us with a timely and much needed road map for how anthropology can best move forward in an era when our insights into the shared human condition are not simply intellectual food for thought, but crucial to the survival of our species and our planet.

JASON DE LEÓN, Arthur F. Thurnau Professor, University of Michigan

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Borofsky asks us to address vitally important issues—regarding disciplinary relevance, accountability and accessibility—at a critical time. An intrepid scholar, he is not content simply to call for a publicly engaged anthropology; he provides ways forward to accomplish it. One of the book's most valuable contributions is its refusal to get drawn into an easy opposition between academic and engaged work. Instead the book, in drawing both together, seeks an ever-critical, publicly engaged relevance that reinvigorates the discipline. We should embrace *An Anthropology of Anthropology's* call for change.

SIMONE DENNIS, Head of School, Archaeology and Anthropology, The Australian National University

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Rob Borofsky's clarion call for a more engaged public anthropology asks some of the necessary hard questions: What are anthropology's evidentiary standards and characteristic inferential leaps? How do academic publishing and the new emphasis on metrics bolster individual careers while sidelining the broader community? Why do universities and foundations so often stifle scholars' desires to speak to audiences beyond academia? Readers of this insightful book will encounter an erudite, critical voice that questions many of the discipline's fundamental practices. *An Anthropology of Anthropology* is a book well worth reading.

MARC EDELMAN, Professor of Anthropology, Hunter College and CUNY Graduate Center; President, American Ethnological Society

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Public anthropology's long-serving ambassador weighs in on issues that have shaped the discipline's place in the world. Using American anthropology as a case study, the book merits careful consideration by anyone interested in how cultural anthropology might transform itself.

HARRI ENGLUND, Professor of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge

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This book is a rare treasure. Mild-mannered and provocative, learned and playful, well documented and well written, acutely timely yet timeless, Borofsky showcases the magic of anthropological knowledge and the need for anthropology to be engaged and public, yet he also argues that contemporary anthropology suffers from cocooning and internal fragmentation. Through a wealth of stories, cases and analytical perspectives, Borofsky shows why everybody deserves to have a little bit of anthropology in their lives.

THOMAS HYLLAND ERIKSEN, Professor of Social Anthropology, University of Oslo

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For the past century, anthropology has established itself within and through universities. But what, fundamentally, is anthropology's purpose beyond the classroom? In an important rethinking of a field he loves, Borofsky has thrown down the gauntlet, arguing that a field devoted to the understanding of cultures and the diverse ways people behave must be held to a higher standard. The challenge of fashioning an anthropology accountable to a broader public isn't new, as readers of the discipline's major figures, from Boas to Mead, know. But Borofsky shakes up the debate in new and engaging ways. As you will see, the book offers much food for thought. I truly enjoyed this book. I hope it finds a wide readership.

PAUL FARMER, MD, PhD, Kolokotronis University Professor, Harvard University

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Champion of public anthropology, Rob Borofsky delivers in this book his long-awaited program for a renewal of the discipline. Starting with a critical state of the art, he then defends and illustrates an alternative paradigm, which would involve a radical transformation of the way in which the academia considers its responsibility toward society. Rich in numerous case studies, this book will undoubtedly give rise to valuable discussions among anthropologists.

DIDIER FASSIN, Professor of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study

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A spirited challenge to anthropology's public image and efficacy, one that should stir up vigorous controversy and renewed public engagement.

MICHAEL M.J. FISCHER, Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities, Professor of Anthropology and Science and Technology Studies, MIT

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This is a very important critique of the decline of anthropological thinking into the shrinking corridor of careerism in which quantity has replaced quality, in which creativity and pathbreaking ideas have become a relic of the past. Borofsky makes a strong plea for redirecting anthropology into the world beyond the academy that is our object of study in order to produce knowledge that has a real impact on others and is not simply focused on our own social status and career steps.

JONATHAN FRIEDMAN, Distinguished Professor of Anthropology, U.C. San Diego, Directeur D'études, *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales*, Paris

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Anthropology is turning in on itself and this is deeply problematic. The field has become overly specialized and narrow at a time when it needs to convey its insights to those beyond the discipline. It needs to ask big questions that matter to others. Rob Borofsky asks why cultural anthropology falls short of this potential. In his search to answer this question, he challenges the university-based contexts that shape the field—what he terms the fields “self-affirming myths” and its limited sense of objectivity. Building on case studies, he explores an alternative paradigm that could bring cultural anthropology closer to fulfilling its potential. Borofsky has proposed a very valuable way forward and we thank him for it.

MAURICE GODELIER, Professeur d’Anthropologie and Directeur, *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales*, Paris

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There is a general consensus that anthropology is in trouble. It is a discipline sitting on top of a vast compendium of accumulated knowledge about human social and cultural achievement and possibility, increasingly uncertain as what, precisely, was supposed to be the point of compiling it. In this admirable volume, Robert Borofsky suggests one possible way out: one that anthropologists would do well to take very seriously.

Anthropologists have now spent a generation reflecting on power dynamics “in the field”—that is, where there are unlikely to be any real-world consequences because we are the ones with all the power - but written almost nothing about conditions of work, patronage, funding, institutional hierarchy in the academy—that is, the power relations under which anthropological writing is actually produced. Robert Borofsky is one of the few who’s had the requisite courage to do so.

DAVID GRAEBER, Professor of Anthropology, London School of Economics

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An Anthropology of Anthropology raises important, provocative questions about the future of anthropology and contributes to a much-needed conversation about the discipline’s relevance to critical social and political issues of our time. It offers much food for thought.

SETH HOLMES, Martin Sisters Endowed Chair; Co-Director, Berkeley Center for Social Medicine; Associate Professor of Medical Anthropology and Public Health, U.C. Berkeley

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With a brisk look at anthropology's past, a sharp critique of its present, and a clear recipe for its immediate future, Borofsky catches a sea change in the discipline's perception of itself. The book will surely be much used in the classroom, and its arguments much debated.

MICHAEL LAMBEK, Canada Research Chair, University of Toronto Scarborough

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An Anthropology of Anthropology is a thoughtful, provocative book. When you finish it, I expect you will be much more strongly inclined to agree on the paramount need for the field to work at building an explicit consensus about what an anthropology degree signals to the world and also agree that the standards of accountability we set for ourselves go well beyond bibliometrics to include the ways in which our work contributes to a more just and sustainable global community.

EDWARD LIEBOW, Executive Director at American Anthropological Association

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Rob Borofsky's timely book calls for a paradigm shift in cultural anthropology, one in which emphasis is given to a "public anthropology" designed expressly to benefit the lives of others. Findings shown to be clearly beneficial to research subjects are stressed and, further, a critique is made of a tendency among anthropologists towards self-aggrandizement at the expense of covering the entirety of relevant fields in a just manner. This book will make a major contribution to cultural anthropology.

MARGARET LOCK, Marjorie Bronfman Professor Emerita, McGill University; Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada

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Many observers think that anthropology is in a state of crisis. Robert Borofsky suggests a way forward—ditching scholarship as usual, increasing scientific collaboration and comparison, and evaluating scholars on the value of their real-world impact. This is a thoughtful, provocative, challenging intervention into a conversation we must have.

TANYA MARIE LUHRMANN, Howard H. and Jessie T. Watkins University Professor of Anthropology, Stanford University

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I am inspired by the faith Rob Borofsky places in what anthropologists can do in bringing professional and activist roles together—what I termed in the 1990s ‘circumstantial activism’—for the benefit of both publics and anthropology. There is a fearless, yet well informed, judgment here about the value of the paths that various anthropological traditions of scholarship have taken. There is a call for explicit acts of public service built into anthropological research drawn from an informed reading of its history.

Many anthropologists are self-identified activists. But all works of anthropological scholarship have publics within them who are inadequately addressed or recognized. What if these works were articulated as both scholarly and public at the same time? This is the fearless and difficult challenge—in a hopeful voice—that Borofsky has been proposing to anthropology for some time.

Far from being a ‘turn’ as many advocated trends are termed, this is a call to make an explicit part of the discipline’s research as currently performed something that has lain embedded in the ethos of being an anthropologist all along. As anthropology seeks a way forward in difficult times, this is an important book to read.

GEORGE E. MARCUS, Founding Editor, *Cultural Anthropology*; Chancellor’s Professor,
UC Irvine

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In *An Anthropology of Anthropology*, Borofsky challenges us to apply anthropological theories and methods to our discipline. Full of new interpretations of old anthropological chestnuts, the book is immediately a compendium of public anthropology stories, and examples of our best and worst practices. It is perfect for teaching and for reflecting on the state of our profession, both inside and outside of the classroom. More broadly, this book is call for a more effective public anthropology. Indeed, Borofsky stresses, as anthropologists, we must work better to address and solve the world’s problems.

TAD McILWRAITH, Associate Professor, Guelph University; Co-Editor, *Perspectives: An Open Invitation to Cultural Anthropology*

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In this thoughtful book Borofsky challenges the field of cultural anthropology to finally be true to its core values by boldly moving past the “do no harm” seemingly neutral stance of the academy, to a more proactive “do good!” model of anthropology with no apologies. He challenges us to reclaim our own unique research tools such as ethnography and participant observation, increasingly used by other fields without attribution. Using theoretical concepts such as Kuhn’s notion of paradigm and Gramsci’s notion of hegemonic type structures, the book charts a roadmap for us as anthropologists to pursue, “the road not taken” as he calls it, to implement an authentic public anthropology. Please consider its message!

YOLONDA MOSES, Professor of Anthropology and Associate Vice Chancellor, U.C. Riverside; Past President of the American Anthropological Association, the American Association for Higher Education, and the City University of New York

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Borofsky argues that anthropology needs more engagement with the world outside academia. The public needs to hear from us directly—a more public anthropology. A must read!

LAURA NADER, Professor of Anthropology, U.C. Berkeley

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Borofsky offers a richly narrated guide to anthropology that succeeds equally as an introduction to the discipline for students and as a guide to its reform for those who practice it. His account of the place of public anthropology in the face of unprecedented challenges to public discourse and the integrity of scholarship is informative, timely, and inspiring.

RONALD NIEZEN, Katharine A. Pearson Chair in Civil Society and Public Policy, McGill University

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This book offers tough love for anthropology. Borofsky shows us how the structures of academic “success” harness anthropologists to the production of our own irrelevance. He challenges us to do more to realize cultural anthropology’s untapped public potential. It is a, timely, important contribution.

ANDREW ORTA, Acting Director, Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies; Professor of Anthropology, University of Illinois

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An impassioned critique of insular social science from one of public anthropology's staunchest allies. Borofsky's book provides both a lucid diagnosis of the field's professional dynamics and crucial ways to nurture more socially engaged and responsive scholarship.

ANAND PANDIAN, Associate Professor and Director of Undergraduate Studies, Johns Hopkins University

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The message of this provocative, suggestive book is “go public or perish.” Anthropologists are called to deploy their scholarship to impact the world. There is much food for thought as well as action in *An Anthropology of Anthropology*. Well worth reading!

JAMES PEACOCK, Kenan Professor of Anthropology, emeritus, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Past President of the American Anthropological Association

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A unique and inspiring book of research, vision, and heart. *An Anthropology of Anthropology* lays bare how the political economy of promotion in the academy equates quantity and quality and distracts anthropology from applying its truths to helping a world that needs us. Borofsky urges anthropologists to move beyond the enslaving metrics of the academy towards projects grappling with changing the world. Required reading for any anthropologist struggling with not only understanding the world, but with how to change it.

DAVID PRICE, Professor of Anthropology and Sociology, Saint Martin's University; Author of *Cold War Anthropology: The CIA, the Pentagon, and The Growth of Dual Use Anthropology* and *Weaponizing Anthropology: Social Science in Service of the National Security State*

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Borofsky's book is brimming with ideas for redefining anthropology. He shows close up through case studies how the institutional structures of the academy have controlled and restricted anthropology as an intellectual discipline. He asks tough questions about individual accountability, ethics, and self-interests. Has anthropology made real intellectual breakthroughs in recent decades? He confronts anthropologists asking them to reassess and to renew our social contract with the public good so that our ethnographic engagements can enrich the broader society as well as anthropology. For many years Rob Borofsky has been a necessary critic to the profession that he so clearly loves. Once again, he is pushing the envelope toward a more critically interpretive, ethical, and public anthropology for the people—the people they study and for the people who dedicate themselves to the ‘difficult science’ of ethnography.

I recommend this incisive and valuable book to anyone who cares about the future of our field. Once you read it, you will see why.

NANCY SCHEPER-HUGHES, Chancellor's Professor of Medical Anthropology Emerita,
U.C. Berkeley

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Robert Borofsky makes a powerful case for a more outwardly focused and publicly relevant anthropology showing how it can contribute to the major public policy issues of our times. This book offers a refreshing reminder of what makes cultural anthropology distinctive among the human sciences, the richness of anthropology's methodologies, and how these can be harnessed to improve people's lives. This book should be read by all those who care about the future of anthropology, the academy and the uses of publicly-funded research.

CRIS SHORE, Department of Anthropology, Goldsmiths University of London

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"Reach out to others or become irrelevant!" is Rob Borofsky's take home message for American cultural anthropologists. He believes the discipline has shot itself in the foot: producing abstruse publications on topics of little value to the broader world, read only by an insular anthropological audience, and written primarily for the sake of narrow professional advancement. His manifesto is grounded in the conviction that knowledge in the social sciences is best advanced through research that aims to help others. While it remains to be seen whether a morally or politically motivated "mend the world" action anthropology will save our discipline from itself, what is not in doubt (even for a skeptic such as myself) is that *An Anthropology of Anthropology* is a welcome contribution to the crisis literature in cultural anthropology. It is well worth reading and debating.

RICHARD A. SHWEDER, Harold Higgins Swift Distinguished Service Professor,
Comparative Human Development, University of Chicago

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Borofsky gives us a sharp-sighted analysis of anthropology's by turns admirable and troubled history and a way forward based in a new commitment to principles of public engagement and social justice. His book is a valuable, important contribution to the great unfinished project of rethinking our field and its place in the world.

ORIN STARN, Professor of Cultural Anthropology and History, Duke University