

Southern Anthropologist



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Southern Anthropologist

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Editor's Corner/ Gifford S. Nickerson

I was saddened to learn, in a phone conversation with Tony Paredes, of John Peterson's recent death from cancer. In a separate piece in this issue I have briefly recounted some of my experiences with John over the years in an attempt to provide some sense of how I perceive our former colleague. He had the persona of what some of my fellow students in graduate school and I would characterize as a "human being," with all of the implications that phrasing implies. John has left an indelible impress on anthropology in general and the SAS in particular, and his genial presence and contributions will be missed more than we can now imagine.

I encourage members to send along any personal reminiscences about John, and will be glad to publish them in an upcoming issue of the *Southern Anthropologist*. He clearly touched many of us in many ways, and gave us much to emulate in his dedication to the practice of anthropology.

By now, all members should have received information about the upcoming SAS annual meeting; some of the details sent by Barbara Hendry and Richard

Persico also appear in this issue. The key symposium and a full program will again provide members with a few days for intellectual stimulation, and, of course, for convivializing, in an atmosphere that is conducive to both activities.

Tim Wallace, who will be in charge of the book display at the annual meeting, has indicated that authors of books are encouraged to display them **free of charge**. Should there be any questions regarding this policy, please see the note in this issue on page 6 for additional procedural information.

In a previous issue, I suggested that members might contribute some thoughts on "multiculturalism" and/or "political correctness,"—especially from the standpoint of their varying expressions in higher educational contexts—and implications of these expressions. From my experience, definitions and characterizations of these phenomena differ significantly; indeed, the labels have spread so rapidly that consistent meanings have lagged behind the labels.

In any case, we're off to Savannah, and we trust that this year's annual meeting will be a rewarding one for all.

President's Column

Alvin W. Wolfe

Just as I was sitting down to write this column I heard the sad news of the death of our dear colleague John Peterson. You will read a formal obituary elsewhere in this issue, but I feel John was so important to the Southern Anthropological Society, having served in many capacities including the presidency in 1987-88, I had to recognize this.

Among the items I had planned to mention in this commentary is community and international development, a subject that John Peterson was very much involved in right up to his death. Another colleague and friend just returned from the International Development Conference and reported to us enthusiastically that there seems to be a renewed optimism among professionals in the field. It seems that after ten years (and some would say many more) of failures and even disasters, there are changes that give rise to hope for the future. The end of the cold war makes it possible for people to think about social and commu-

nity development in terms other than the binary ones that restricted the vision of so many decisionmakers. The new administration in the United States may also open new options along that line. The World Bank, my friend says, seems to be adopting a better view that might foster healthier development from the neighborhood and community outward instead of the past reliance on one or another version of a "trickle-down" model. If his reflections from the International Development Conference are valid, then we might be coming into an era where anthropology can once again be most helpful.

We are giving some thought to the possibility that next year's Southern Anthropological Society Annual Meeting, or at least the Key Symposium, might focus on conflict resolution, drawing upon some of the expertise in the South, especially that at the Carter Center of Emory University. Their Conflict Resolution Program is holding an "International Negotiation Network Consulta-

tion" this year, studying the issues in a number of conflicts where we anthropologists should be helpful: in Burma, the Caucasus, Haiti, Macedonia/Kosovo and Zaire. If these plans develop it might mean we meet in Georgia two years in a row, before moving our meeting west to Louisiana. Because Atlanta is such a major hub, and a good city in which to meet, SAS members will probably be happy with the outcome.

I received a nice response to my commentary in the Summer 1992 issue of the *Southern Anthropologist* on the subject of recruiting more African Americans into the discipline. Dr. Faye V. Harrison, a past president of the Associ-

ation of Black Anthropologists, wrote that the ABA regularly organizes sessions, informal workshops and publication projects that attract the interest and participation of both Black and White anthropologists. She says it would appear that SAS is adopting an agenda something like what the ABA developed. As she puts it: "The model of and for anthropology that we constructed through our praxis (one of multi-racial and -cultural discourse) is one from which the profession at large could benefit."

I look forward to seeing you all at the meetings in Savannah, March 25-27.

— SA —

Book Display for Recent Authors

Tim Wallace, Annual Meeting Book Exhibit Chair, reminds our members that anyone who has recently published a book is encouraged to display copies at the Book Exhibit at no charge. Wallace suggests that you contact your publisher and ask them to send sufficient copies to the meetings if you wish to sell any there. However, he urges you to notify him in advance if you plan to make use of the opportunity afforded by the S.A.S. You may contact him by letter, phone, FAX or email at the following:

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General
Information

The Desoto Hilton is located in the heart of Savannah's historic district. This is the largest Historic Landmark District in the United States, covering an area of 2.2 square miles. Pre-Civil War and some pre-Revolutionary War homes and other buildings line the streets and park-like squares

of this part of the city. Restaurants serving regional or international cuisine, Irish pubs, jazz clubs, antique and specialty shops, and museums are some of the amenities within walking distance of the Hilton.

Late March is the height of the Spring explosion of azalea, dogwood, and other blossoms, and March 26—28 is the city's annual "Tour of Homes." Do not miss what should be an exciting conference and an opportunity to visit historic Savannah.

We can look forward to the excellent Key Symposium planned for this year's SAS Annual Meeting—"Religion in the South"—and a number of sessions with volunteered papers. Make your reservations early!

In Memoriam

**John H. Peterson, Jr.
1937—1993**

John Peterson—colleague, friend, active member, former president and councillor of the Southern Anthropological Society—died of cancer at his home in Mississippi on January 11, 1993.

I first met John at an annual meeting in New Orleans in the late 1960s, after which we renewed contact just about every year at an AAA or some other annual meeting. Because we were then anthropological neophytes, we enjoyed comparing notes relating to our experiences and aspirations since our last meeting.

In 1987-1988, when John was president of the SAS and I began editing the *Southern Anthropologist*, our close contact relating to the newsletter impressed me with his seriousness and focus. He was a good communicator—approachable, thoughtful and cooperative. John undertook SAS tasks with such enthusiasm and commitment that one easily got caught up in the contagiousness of it all. It was clear that he was intent on getting things done well

and in a timely manner, and he consistently succeeded in both respects. But, perhaps even more important, John was an enjoyable person to be around; although he might have been focused on matters with which he was currently involved, he always was eager to discuss activities in which his colleagues were engaged.

While it is not possible to adequately depict John Peterson's full and varied life and career, including his contributions to anthropology, and those to the SAS, I will recount some salient—albeit selective—aspects of his life and work.

Born in 1937 in Tifton, Georgia, John received his B.A. *cum laude* in 1959 at North Georgia College, Dahlonega, Georgia, and his M.Ed. (1965) and Ph.D. (1970)—the latter *with distinction*—at the University of Georgia. He advanced from Assistant Professor of Sociology and Anthropology in 1969, to full Professor in 1975 at Mississippi State University, with which he was af-

filiated at the time of his death.

His work in administration included: Head of the Department of Anthropology at Mississippi State (1974 to 1982), Director of Mississippi State's Cobb Institute of Archaeology, (1981 to 1988), Coordinator of his department's anthropology program (1984-1988), and Acting Head and Graduate Coordinator of his department (1988 to 1989).

His scholarly interests centered on applied anthropology, some aspect of which was represented in virtually all of his research, publications, teaching, and presentations. His applied concerns led him to investigate a range of environmental issues in anthropology, considerations relating to natural resources and rural development, matters relating to social impact assessment, and factors underlying alcoholism.

Throughout his academic life, John maintained a strong interest in, and contributed significantly to the literature relating to the Mississippi Choctaw Indians, beginning with research for his doctoral dissertation, which he entitled *The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians: Their Recent History and Current Social Relations*. In 1989, John's interests turned to applied research in Zimbabwe, where he was a Fulbright Lecturer in the Centre for Applied Social Science, University of Zimbabwe, from January of 1990 to August of 1991.

John will be sorely missed, not only by SAS members, but by the anthropological community at large. Neither he, as a friend and colleague, nor his solid contributions to the SAS and anthropology be forgotten.

I am grateful to a number of people for assisting me with information for some of the material which appears in this obituary: to **Tony Paredes**, who notified me of John Peterson's death; to **Lucy Coulburn**, Director of Information Services at North Carolina State University, for contacting **Kay Jones** at the Office of University Relations at Mississippi State University, who, in turn, kindly sent a FAX of a local newspaper obituary; and to **Kathy Elliott** of the Cobb Institute of Archaeology at Mississippi State University, who sent me a FAX of John Peterson's *Curriculum Vitae*.

G.S.N.

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Winning Entry: 1992 SAS Graduate Student Paper Competition

Dream Interpretation as Traditional Wisdom

Brenda G. Stewart

Cultural significance has been ascribed to dreams over a wide range of time and space, from the "dream books" of the early Babylonians to Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, from the "Dreamtime" of the Australian aborigines to the dream theology of the seventeenth-century Iroquois. Research about dreaming is just as widespread. Anthropologists, including Tylor, A.F.C. Wallace, Dorothy Eggan, Erika Bourguignon and many others, have looked at the significance of dreams within a specific culture. Psychologists have theorized about the meaning of dreams for the individual and the relationship of dreaming to conscious cognition.

Neurologists and sleep researchers are now actively investigating the physiological mechanisms of dreaming, but

the majority of this work has been done since the pioneering discoveries of Kleitman and Aserinsky in the early fifties (Hobson 1988:139-145). A great deal of anthropological and psychological work was done before then and much of what has been done since then has not considered the physiological aspects of dreaming. The neurologists, on the other hand, have frequently ignored or dismissed the "meaning" of dreams. This paper looks at dreaming from a cultural perspective, taking into account current research into the neurological and cognitive aspects.

Traditional wisdom is the body of knowledge about what is adaptive for a particular group in its particular environment, passed from one generation to the next. Sometimes the lesson is explicit: "That's the way we've always done it."

Other elements are learned by observation. Usually, the traditional wisdom rests on an empirical base, though the supporting conditions may not be as stringently controlled as Western science would demand.

Because it increases predictability, traditional wisdom serves to relieve anxiety, and it may be retained by a society long after the conditions under which it was adaptive have disappeared. Those who follow it may be unaware of its origins and may have developed a rationale that has little relation to its original purpose. Any of life's regular occurrences are likely to be incorporated into traditional wisdom. One such universal is dreaming.

The physiological signs of dreaming in humans—rapid eye movement and low-voltage, high-frequency brain waves—are found in primates, cats, dogs, horses and other animals, from which it can be inferred that the process serves some function or is the necessary by-product of other essential biological functions. Humans, as meaning makers, have attributed meaning to the phenomenon, which may be approached on two levels: 1) the manifest content, which consists of the imagery and narrative sequence that the dreamer can recall and relate, and 2) the interpretation that is culturally assigned to the dream. Universals can be identified at both levels because humans share physiological and

psychological needs. Differences exist as well, because people adapt to different and ever-changing environments, of which culture is a part.

Hobson's description of dreaming (1988) holds that even though sensory input is muted during sleep, the neurons in the pontine brain stem fire randomly and these signals are interpreted by the cortex as if they came from extrasomatic sources. Hunt (1989) proposes a multi-dimensional model for this interpretation, which he considers to be the same process as waking cognition. The model incorporates imagery, consolidation and reorganization of memory, metaphor and metonymy (Hunt 1989:94-95).

At one level, he contends, we draw on memory of our previous experiences to fill the gaps between the random signals and create a meaningful image. At another level, this image is associated with others—visual, auditory or kinesthetic—to produce a coherent narrative. Since our conscious censor is turned off, the associations may be capricious, resulting in the puns and bizarre occurrences common in dreams. On another dimension, the memories incorporated into dreams at the lowest and most frequent level are the most recent experiences, those known as "day residue," and at a deeper level long-term memory is invoked.

Thus, while dreams can be said to

be caused by random events, the meaning created by the individual—i.e., the imagery and narrative—is dependent on the experience of that individual within a culture. Since this imagery and narrative is frequently “meaningless” or “bizarre” in terms of the real world, the opportunity for interpretation is presented, and this is where traditional wisdom operates. The mode of interpretation that best serves to reduce anxiety within a particular cultural environment will be the one passed on by traditional wisdom. In turn, insofar as dream narration and interpretation are public events, the culturally prescribed symbolism and functions will become part of the individual’s experience and memory, to be drawn on in the process of dreaming.

Frequent functions of dream interpretation as prescribed by traditional wisdom are conflict resolution, legitimization of the social order, prediction of the future, and the diagnosis/healing of illness. The functions are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but in general the focus in a given culture can be described as primarily one or the other. I have chosen examples from the literature which illustrate these.

Vincent Crapanzano, in his 1975 article, “Saints, Jnun, and Dreams: An Essay in Moroccan Ethnopsychology,” describes his work with members of a religious brotherhood, the Hamadsha. For these people, as for many others,

dreams represent the wandering of the soul and “are thought to be related, most often symbolically, to the dreamer’s future” (Crapanzano 1975:150). In some dreams, however, the saints or demons that fill their world come to them and reveal a path that the dreamer must follow. According to Crapanzano, “Frequently visitational dreams serve to resolve conflicts that may not be clearly articulated by the dreamer (1975:150).

His most striking example is of a man named Mohammed, who had been sent unwillingly from his home in Marrakesh to do a job in Meknes. He was eventually joined by his wife and child and made a new life for himself there. As the eldest son, however, it was expected that he would return to Marrakesh, in spite of the fact that his father, “even by Moroccan standards, was a tyrant” (1975:152). Mohammed, after three years in Meknes, made his plans to return to Marrakesh and bought the bus tickets. On the night before they planned to leave, he and his wife both had dreams in which they were visited by saints who told them not to go. Following the instructions, they changed their plans and stayed in Meknes. Thus, the conflict between the cultural expectation that he return to Marrakesh and his individual desire to stay in Meknes was resolved by supernatural authority.

No matter how much individual freedom a culture allows, there are times

when the interests of the individual and the corporate entity—whether household, clan or community—are in conflict. The result is anxiety, and traditional wisdom, the function of which is to reduce anxiety, provides in dream interpretation a way of resolving the conflict. In this instance, the commands of a saint have priority over both the cultural expectation and the individual desire and therefore legitimize the decision in the eyes of the family and of Mohammed. But, in the light of dream research, it seems reasonable to say that knowledge of the cultural function of the visitational dream is part of the individual's memory store, to be drawn on in creating the dream. Thus the traditional wisdom provides through the culturally prescribed mode of dream interpretation a way of overriding cultural norms without threatening their ultimate authority.

The use of dreams to legitimize the social order (and as a different sort of conflict resolution) is depicted by Richard T. Curley (1983). He describes a West African Christian sect that overtly espouses ideals of egalitarianism, cooperation, peace and harmony. In reality, however, the sect is hierarchical, competitive and authoritarian. Reconciliation of the ideals with reality is accomplished by the use of dream-telling and interpreting as a forum for determining the composition of the hierarchy. Dreams are regarded as the means by which God

communicates with members of the sect, and narration of dreams is incorporated into the services.

Those dreams which deal directly with religious themes and are immediately obvious to the listeners are taken at face value; those which are secular in nature, or which are not transparent to the listeners, must be interpreted by the church leaders. Since the holiness of the interpreter is equated with the quality of his performance of the interpretation, the church's allocation of authority "is justified on the grounds that some people have a great degree of faith, better communication with God, and a greater proportion of God's power [and therefore] are rewarded with certain statuses and titles within the church organization" (Curley 1983:33).

Because the duties of the church leaders consist primarily of "keeping the faith of others alive through their words" (Curley 1983:36), evaluation of performance skills is a valid way to determine an individual's qualification for office. The attribution of responsibility to God relieves the members of the anxiety that would result from openly acknowledging the existence of competition and allows them to maintain the fiction of egalitarianism and cooperation.

It might be argued that there has not been enough time for this particular form of dream interpretation to qualify as traditional wisdom, since the sect is

relatively new, having "originated in eastern Nigeria in 1953" (Curley 1983:22). It is likely, however, that it stems not from the Christian tradition, which "discredited dreams, relegated them to a secondary place, and treated them with suspicion" (Kilborne 1987:184), but from the long-standing African tradition. According to Yonker: "Dreams in Africa have been traditionally used as validation of the exercise of power. Election to a special rank or office was often indicated by the transmission of special knowledge in a dream" (1982:247).

The Mae Enga, as reported by Meggitt (1962), are an example of a society that uses dream interpretation to predict the future. They classify dreams as obvious or as needing interpretation and, within each category, as important or trivial. The distinction between important and trivial is based partly on the presence or absence of certain symbols and emotional affect, but the status of the dreamer is taken into account as well. The dreams of children and young women are generally ignored, as are those of young men, except during the period of ritual seclusion. In fact, in a clan-parish of about 350 members, "the number of people regarded as ominous dreamers is from about five to ten" (Meggitt 1962:220). Of these, most will be members of one of the socially important groups: "big men," matriarchs,

diviners, and mediums. One or two may be otherwise unremarkable men who have a reputation for accurate prediction.

In one case, Meggitt and the "big man," Anggauwane, were away from the village while a bridge was being constructed. Travelers reported that the bridge had been finished, but that night Anggauwane dreamed that two large logs were not yet in place. The following day, they returned to the village to find the logs being dragged to the river. Meggitt comments, "He rejected rather brusquely my tactless suggestion that his dream might have reflected his superior understanding of the mechanics and timetable of local bridge building" (1962:222). Certainly Anggauwane may not have been consciously aware of making such a judgment, but his knowledge would have been available to the dreaming process as would his concern about the progress of the bridge building.

In another example, the dreamer, this time one of the "insignificant" people with a reputation for accurate prediction, reported dreaming that the men of his clan and those of the neighboring clan were singing on the hillside. His interpretation was that this foretold encroachments by the other clan on the land of his own clan. For a week or so, there were discussions of what action should be taken to forestall the predic-

tion. Then an infant, whose mother was of one clan and father of the other, died, and "the 'true' meaning of the dream suddenly became clear" (Meggitt 1962:220): the men of the two clans gathered to sing in mourning. Obviously, if the interpretation can be changed after the fact, it will never be wrong.

A third example involves a series of dreams that predicted illness and misfortune (Meggitt 1962:222-224). In this case, ritual sacrifice was performed to prevent the fulfillment of the prediction. Here also, the predictor could not lose: if things happened as predicted, he has been proved right; if not, he was still right, but the sacrifice was accepted and the misfortune averted. Thus, dreams foretelling the future reduce anxiety by increasing predictability—with the odds stacked in favor of successful prediction.

A secondary function in this culture is reinforcement of the social order by basing the significance of a dream on the social status of the dreamer. Meggitt does not tell how the Mae Enga distinguish between "otherwise nondescript men" (1962:220) who gain a reputation for successful prediction—and those whose accurate prediction is dismissed as a "lucky guess" (1962:221). It would be interesting to test the hypothesis that those who are accepted as significant dreamers have demonstrated their good judgment but lack family connections or

other social qualifications to become "big men."

Dreams are commonly incorporated into concepts of illness, as diagnostic tools or as causative agents. The ancient Greeks, as shown in the *Oneirocritica* (Kilborne 1983), the Iroquois (Wallace 1958) and the Navajo (Morgan 1931,1932) are well known examples. Since anxiety has been shown to cause many forms of illness, it is reasonable to conclude that dreams that cause anxiety will therefore cause illness and that the use of dream interpretation to relieve anxiety may facilitate the cure of illness. Traditional wisdom recognizes the distinction between illnesses for which it is appropriate to invoke dreams as cause or cure and those for which it is not. This is illustrated by the fact that for minor illness or injury the Navajo have "home remedies." "If these fail, or *the element of fear is present*, the patient seeks the advice and ministrations of a diagnostician" (Morgan 1931:399, emphasis mine).

These examples illustrate that the physiological and cognitive processes of dreaming are consistent with an interactive process in which traditional wisdom prescribes a particular form of dream interpretation that, in turn, influences the manifest content of dreams. The synergistic effect can take place without any conscious attempt to manipulate the system. Bourguignon (1954:266) notes

that in telling dreams the dreamer changes them to fit cultural interpretations, although she does not imply that this is done with intent. In any case, conscious manipulation would only reinforce the interaction, not negate it. In all cases, dream interpretation is used to alleviate anxiety, although the specific source of anxiety and thus the specific form of dream interpretation are peculiar to the circumstances of the culture.

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UNCW SUMMER SCHOOL IN BARBADOS 1993

DATES: July 20 to August 12, 1993

COURSES: ANT 294 Peoples and Cultures of the Caribbean (3 cr)
Dr. Patricia B. Lerch, Cultural Anthropologist

HST 294 Community Studies (3 cr)
Dr. Kathleen Berkeley, Historian

PLACE: Students will live and study at the Belairs Research Institute of McGill University on the west coast of Barbados.

FIELD TRIPS: Field trips to sugar plantations, fishing villages and other historical and cultural sites.

ISLAND: Barbados is a small island, 14 x 21 miles, with good roads and public transportation. West coast beaches are famous for coral reefs and clear water; Atlantic coast beaches for world class surfing. The island's culture is a creole blend of English and African customs. Independent since 1966, Barbados is one of the most stable democracies of the Caribbean. Our visit overlaps with Crop Over, a month long celebration of food, art, music, culture and history.

PROFESSORS: Dr. Lerch has done research on Barbados since 1986 and conducted two previous study abroad programs on Barbados. Dr. Berkeley is a noted community historian whose work includes gender and African American history.

ESTIMATED COSTS: \$1800 IN STATE; \$2300.00 OUT OF STATE
Cost includes: Round trip airfare from Wilmington to Barbados, Six credits tuition; Room and two meals daily; required field trips

INFORMATION AND APPLICATIONS:

Dr. Patricia B. Lerch or Dr. Kathleen Berkeley
919-395-3705 or 919-395-3309

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Southern Anthropologist

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