

UC Irvine

UC Irvine Previously Published Works

Title

New Ethnographies

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1ff321z1>

Journal

Urban Life, 15(1)

ISSN

0098-3039

Author

Kirk, Jerome

Publication Date

1986-04-01

DOI

10.1177/0098303986015001006

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

although similar tensions between respectability and the profits from deviance are found in accounts of communities in which moonshining, gambling, and prostitution are important local industries. What sets contemporary Humboldt County apart is the sensationalistic media coverage and CAMP's tactics. Raphael's sensitive analysis helps the reader distinguish the historical backdrop, the characters' motives, and the effect of the spotlight on this contemporary drama.

—Joel Best
California State University,
Fresno

ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH: A GUIDE TO GENERAL CONDUCT, Roy F. Ellen (ed.), Orlando: Academic Press, 1984. 403 pp. \$49.50 (cloth).

Particularly among their colleagues in the humanities, ethnographers (practitioners of those subdisciplines which in Great Britain comprise "social anthropology") enjoy a reputation for far more than ordinary boldness, empathy, and perseverance. This reputation is certainly at least partially justified. With equal justice, however, most anthropologists and those sociologists who prefer to work in naturalistic frameworks commonly appear, especially to their scientific colleagues, unusually subjective, undisciplined, and vague. For the past two decades or so, the fields of anthropology and sociology have been beset by a sense of crisis that follows in great part from practitioners' ambivalent feelings about this image.

On one hand, these pretensions constitute a claim to be a superhuman being, possessed of the best of the masculine (courage) and feminine (insight) virtues. To specify and demystify the mechanical techniques and procedures by which reports more profound than those of tourists are generated from exotic, dangerous, and disreputable scenes would seem to deny the specialness of the ethnographer as man or woman. Worse, it would acknowledge the personal and professional anxieties all ethnographers experience from the first time they are thrown into "the field," naked but for pencil, notebook, flashlight, and recollections of the term paper they wrote on Emile Durkheim.

On the other hand, refusing to tell folks what it is we do for a living patently constitutes "a secretiveness which is ethically suspicious and ill-suited to both [the profession's] humanistic and scientific pretensions." Indeed, it often makes it hard to find a job.

In recent years, much self-reflective literature has appeared, particularly in the United States, attempting to "delauder" the activity of fieldwork. Much of this literature has emphasized the interactional character of data collection in the field and the inapplicability of the naive positivist model of a detached observer passively recording external "facts." A smaller proportion has attended to the pragmatic issue that research and professional employment tend to be funded by those of a relatively positivistic orientation, and has sought to explain in their language what it is the fieldworker actually does. With rare exceptions, however, the bulk of this literature has discussed epistemological and meta-methodological issues rather than the sort of actual technique that is taught to students of the natural sciences, for example, in their laboratory courses.

In 1981, at the Edinburgh meeting of the Association of Social Anthropologists, it was deemed appropriate to produce

a series on methods in social anthropology which we hope will become standard reference works. Each one will attempt to be both practical and authoritative, to provide guidance to anyone likely to be involved in the conduct of ethnographic research, to help readers interpret in a critical fashion the assumptions upon which research is based, and to evaluate research procedures resulting in published work.

The present volume is the first and most general of that series. It contains, in addition to an introduction by Ellen, chapters ranging in abstraction from John Clammer's "Approaches to Ethnographic Research" to Ellen and David Hicks's "Preparation for Fieldwork," and J. Davis's "Data into Text." Each is richly condensed and tightly organized; the kind of content can perhaps be suggested by a list of the major headings in the latter:

Introduction/Kinds of Data (Systematic and exhaustive data, Systematic but not exhaustive data, Descriptive data, Intuitive knowledge)/Indexing and Sorting (Mnemonics, References, Structure)/The Use of Computers (Indexing, Text editing, Other operations,

Forward planning for computers, Should you buy a computer?)/Presentation and Style/Anonymity and Garbling.

By itself, this volume is not a complete handbook for the conduct of fieldwork, despite its forbidding price. Yet it appears entirely to fulfill the objectives Ellen sets forth for it, and is one of the few books an anthropologist might actually wish to keep in his or her backpack. The entire series (another couple of volumes of which have been published) is not within the budget of the typical fieldworker, but will clearly be a fundamental resource that every apprentice fieldworker should study, and one of the sort which will be of even more value to the experienced fieldworker.

—Jerome Kirk
University of California, Irvine

THE BOYS IN THE BARRACKS: OBSERVATIONS ON AMERICAN MILITARY LIFE, Larry H. Ingraham (with Critical Commentary by Frederick J. Manning), Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984. 242 pp. \$17.50 (cloth).

Boys in the Barracks is a practical ethnography about the everyday activities of soldiers below the rank of sergeant who are part of the garrison Army. The purpose of the book is to tie the informal principles of social organization in the quasi-total institutional company barracks to patterns of alcohol and drug use. Lieutenant Colonel Ingraham's findings suggest that alcohol and other drugs do not so much make for "social problems" as they make for group and subgroup solidarity.

National concern over "the drug abuse problem" in the Army first became evident in the early 1970s. One outgrowth of this was a complex Walter Reed Institute of Research study broadly focusing on "how many soldiers are using what kinds of drugs with what frequency and with what effect on individual and group behavior." A multidisciplinary team conducted a multiphase study of one medium-sized Army post in the eastern United States. In the first phase, the team made preliminary first-hand observations of military life at "Fort Marshall," investigated the