

Saggin' and Braggin'

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Don't get caught with your pants down in Delcambre, Louisiana; it will cost you \$500.00 or six months in jail. Carol Broussard, the mayor of this bayou township with fewer than 2,000 people, signed into law an ordinance passed by his town council on June 11, 2007. The ordinance criminalizes those ubiquitous baggy pants worn by young men, and some women, that are at once a fashion statement of urban cool, a sign of youthful rebellion, and a clever way for heavily branded boxer briefs to compete with denim jeans over the visible real estate on the bodies of members of the covered 16–24 demographic, many of whom seem to relish paying top dollar to become walking billboards for designers of their favorite gear.

The new law states that "it shall be unlawful for any person in any public place or in view of the public to be found in a state of nudity, or partial nudity, or in dress not becoming to his or her sex, or in any indecent exposure of his or her person or undergarments, or be guilty of any indecent or lewd behavior" (Associated Press 2007a). Within a month the town of Mansfield, Louisiana passed a similar law and other towns are planning to follow suit (Associated Press 2007b).

Although Louisiana has public decency laws on the books, the stiff fine and "draw clause" were added in an effort to both discipline and punish the mostly black and brown youth who sport this unique style, a style that has been putatively associated with gang violence, disrespect of authority, and in my opinion, a general sense that it is possible but not probable to make it in America – so why try? These men, who for the most part are undereducated and underemployed people of color, know that it's a long shot to achieve the American Dream by simply working hard and playing by the rules. In some respects, this is a much more productive response to the long shot of achieving the American Dream, because others resort to abusing methamphetamines, alcohol, or food, which leads to rampant

addiction in many white communities and to type II diabetes in Native American communities.

Wearing baggy pants, or saggin' as it has become known, is a fashion statement that has emerged by articulating a consistent pattern of creative adaptation that involves inverting and transmuting the monks and symbols of racism, disrespect, and humiliation into symbols of power, pride, and respect. Yet such symbols are always already steeped in contradictions and complicated; unintended consequences immediately become read and interpreted within a racial politics of culture and a cultural politics of race. It is widely believed that saggin' as a style was adopted from prison culture, where belts are prohibited and ill-fitting prison garb the norm (Christian 2007: 16). Judge Greg Mathis, who hosts his own eponymous courtroom television show, has become a self-proclaimed fashion critic, or at least a critic of this fashion. He told readers of *Jet Magazine* that "you have this in[l]terchange of what is cool and hip in the hood and what is cool and hip in prison. You have a rotating door" (Christian 2007: 18).

In the wake of particularly draconian dress codes in schools and prisons, young men have been routinely told what and what not to wear. Frankly, there are few options because a wide palette of colors – as well as a wide range of National Basketball Association and National Football League mascots – are associated with gang membership and subsequently banned from schools, recreation centers, and other public spaces. An interesting trend has emerged among urban and rural youth, which I think must be understood as explicit, sardonic cynicism. They have begun to sport simple, all white t-shirts, thus transforming the unassuming tee into the latest must-have gear. As if on cue, the white t-shirt became the target of policing and censorship. Although not yet as inimical to the customs and mores of middle America as sagging jeans, the long white t-shirt is now increasingly associated with gang violence and pathological behavior, and sanctioned under strict dress codes. If a t-shirt is violet and emblazoned with Tommy Hilfinger or Sean John it's fine. If a young adult wants to don gang-neutral garb and ad-free gear, however, he might not be able to go to school, get into a night club, or dine at a restaurant (Ayad 2006: B1). Writingly or not, a large swath of the fashion-savvy hip-hop/wired generation have begun to tog out with the most innocuous and least offensive piece of clothing one could imagine. By doing so, they have collectively forced the so-called powers-that-be to demonstrate that the real subject of policing is not their clothes but the bodies of black and brown boys. The white t-shirt is, by definition, unmarked; but on these bodies it is assigned a mark of urban degeneracy that cannot be worn in many venues because it putatively

promotes violence. Whether it is baggy pants inspired by prison garb or a simple white t-shirt that belies any gang affiliation, the pattern is the same. When black people appropriate it as their own, the meaning changes and the object, or sound, or food, or clothing takes on a new meaning. Sometimes it's negative, but often it is positive; most always it is shot through with ambivalence and anxiety.

Inverting, Converting, and Subverting

In the case of hip-hop, jazz – and, one could argue, food, religion, fashion and sport – the inversions and interpretations are appropriated and consumed around the world as authentic urban America. This is often just a euphemism for poor and black, but it sells and becomes integrated into the global mainstream. This pattern of inversion and reappropriation is nothing new. Zora Neale Hurston, in her unevenly balanced but emphatic “Characteristics of Negro Expression,” described it pretty well in 1934 when she argued that

The Negro is a very original being. While he lives and moves in the midst of a white civilisation, everything that he touches is re-interpreted for his own use. He has modified the language, mode of food preparation, practice of medicine, and most certainly the religion of his new country . . . Everyone is familiar with the Negro's modification of the whites' musical instruments, so that his interpretation has been adopted by the white man himself and then reinterpreted. . . . Thus has arisen a new art in the civilised world, and thus has our so-called civilisation come. The exchange and re-exchange of ideas between groups. (Hurston 1995: 839)

One of the most salient examples of this reappropriation is the way that a word employed solely as a term of defilement was redeployed as a sincere term of endearment. Its global reach, to me, is nothing short of astonishing.

I was in Ghana during the summer of 2007 and one of my favorite hangouts was BusyInternet on Ring Road in the heart of Accra's financial and technology district. BusyInternet is the largest privately owned and operated Internet and communications center in Africa, and it serves as a gathering place for tony urban professionals, creative artists, and competitive entrepreneurs who frequent the establishment to network and socialize online and off. Affectionately known as “Busy,” because it is always, it also functions as a veritable *obryini* (white or foreign person) magnet for travelers, college students, and backpackers who desire the Internet bandwidth

and connection speeds they have grown accustomed to but rarely need. It is decidedly cosmopolitan, and very, very cool. The steps leading up to the main reception area and cashier teen with a throng of well-dressed young men sporting the very latest in hip-hop fashion. Unabashed yet respectful, they congregate on the steps to check out the ladies who dash quickly by, making their way inside to the banks and banks of workstations. As I was striding up those steps, one handsome twenty-something man, neatly adorned in an Ecco Unlimited tank, Girbaud denims and very white Puma sneakers caught my eye. He made a fist with his right hand and held his arm at a perfect right angle. He then looked me straight in the eyes and said with all sincerity and affection, “Waz up nigga?” Without breaking my stride, I clenched my fist, lightly pounded his fist and retorted, “What's up?” Simultaneously, we both raised our chins one half of one inch. It's a small ritual of solidarity and mutual respect that I have performed thousands of times, mostly in the United States. Usually brother, cuz, or G is the salutation used, but the meaning and intent were identical in this case.

I am fond of saying that “Ghana is the only place in the world where I am considered a rich white man,” but this might be changing with the explosion of hip-hop and a realization around the diaspora that the many hues of brown qualify as black in the United States. It took me a second or two to process, but then a flood of questions and concerns took over my thoughts. Did he really know what he was saying, or was he doing what Don Imus purportedly did when he referred to the Women's Basketball team at Rutgers University as “happy headed hoers” – just reiterating what he thought was acceptable language of the hip-hop generation? Did this young man know the history of its derivative cousin? Was he thinking that this is how a twenty-something man shows respect to a forty-something man in the United States? He *was* very respectful, and clearly just wanted to connect and show a little love to an *obryini*. I thought to myself, “Does he do this with white people?” I had to get my copy-edits out to *Transforming Anthropology* contributors so I did not have time to follow up, but what struck me was how this particular form of inversion has taken on truly global dimensions.

Battle of the Britches

Parents and guardians, preachers and teachers – and evidently town councils – might become a little anxious when their sons and daughters get Chinese characters tattooed on their calves, pierce a body part, or download

a few songs from Lil' Wayne, Young Jeezy, or 50 Cent to their iPods. Many adults, however, feel compelled to demarcate a threshold or draw a line between acceptability and unacceptability, respectability and disrespect. The town of Delcambre felt the need to promulgate that line in law. It is a line, however, that is moving all the time within and among race, class, gender, religion, sexuality, and generation.

When the news broke that a new "drawz clause" was tacked on to Delcambre's public decency laws, radio shows, blogs, and newspapers took off with the story, quickly deeming it "the battle of the birches." While it was often couched as "wacky" or off-beat news, some blogs and radio shows seriously addressed issues of racism, discrimination, and civil liberties. Some opponents noted its gender trouble because no one seemed to have a problem with the equally ubiquitous thong peek or whale tail – a bright-colored thong peeking above the popular low-rise pants worn by many women of the same age set. Thongs are sexy and acceptable; boxers are dangerous and indecent. Others, however, saw it as a sensible law that would force kids to pull up their birches and show a little respect.

The ordinance supporters and detractors did not break down along racial lines. Many black people support this type of legislation. In fact, the Virginia House of Delegates passed a similar, state-wide ordinance in 2005, and it was sponsored by Algie Howell, a lifetime member of the NAACP (Jonsson 2007: 1). Although the bill was shot down by Virginia's senate, it fueled activists such as Pastor Dianne Robinson of Jacksonville, Florida. Robinson has waged a "Pull up your Pants" campaign in several black communities, a campaign that prompted this sub-headline in *The Washington Post*: "For Christ Sake, Pull up your Pants" (Steiner 2007). Moreover, it was an African American Councilman, Albert Roy, who introduced the ordinance to Delcambre's legislative body. Although Delcambre's Mayor Broussard did not have much to say regarding the complex and cross-cutting issues his small town weighed in on, the one thing he was certain about was that the ordinance was not racist. He implored that "white people wear sagging pants, too. Anybody who wears these pants should be held responsible" (Associated Press 2007a). Of course, he is right; white kids rock this look too. But was he right that the ordinance was not racist?

In the K-mart parking lot in the northern California town of Grass Valley, I have seen tattoo-covered white kids saggin' as they mill around in their custom 4-wheel drives, tossing back cans of Budweiser. Likewise, I have seen sun-dappled white kids saggin' as they fish for croaker off Bouge Inlet pier on the outer banks of North Carolina. I have also seen tough-talking Hmong-American kids sport this style at the Mall of America in

Minneapolis, and smooth-talking Mexican American kids wearing baggies as they listen to music and chill outside the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. On Duke's campus, there are more white kids who sag than black ones (at least in class), but I am always amazed when I go to my neighborhood convenience store and see young black men who really take this fashion to the extreme.

Pull 'em up, Son

It was a Wednesday evening last June when I stopped by the Town & Country Quick Mart, which is across the street from Hillside High School at the corner of Fayetteville and Cook streets in southwest Durham. It was late and hot; the store was unusually empty. I was making my way up to the cashier when a young boy no older than 15 darted in front of me, slapped some change on the counter, and said simply, "Garcia Vega." As the middle-aged Middle Easterner reached below the counter, the youngster cut his eyes at me. In a particularly bold "it takes a village" moment, I said with a hint of disgust and disappointment, "Pull your damn pants up, Son." This was met with a quick roll of the eyes and an even quicker sucking of the teeth. It was another ritual of solidarity, and ended with us exchanging silent glances; his expression screamed, "Shut the fuck up!" while mine distinctly read, "There should be law against that." But neither of us really meant it. I grabbed my beer, he grabbed his blunt and neither of us said another word.

But then, right then, something happened. My identity and values as a father, uncle, and mentor clashed and contradicted with my identity and values as a teacher, anthropologist, and a liberal. My heartfelt desire to uplift the race crashed down around my hard-won understanding of culture, power, and agency. My background as a liberal anthropologist, who understands the complexity of culture, the power of agency, and the way racism often masquerades under the guise of color-blind neutrality, came in sharp contrast with my personal and pragmatic understanding that the only way black people in the United States can make it *is* by working hard and playing by the rules. Yet at the same time I realize that the American Dream is just a chimerical ideology forged in the crucible of whiteness within the furnace of capitalism. Culture is a double-edged sword that usually cuts both ways and produces a tension between the shackles of tradition and the power of performance. Its relationship to race has always been fraught with racism.

The Quick Mart encounter was a queer and liminal moment, but one that I often experience. It is deeply ingrained with my own psycho-social

development, which has always produced second sights, and in many ways driven what I write and the way I write.

I always write for my undergraduate students, and I often have a specific class in mind when I begin to tackle a research project. I want to find ways to demonstrate how the concept of culture is used to advance racism and white supremacy, while it is also used to promote anti-racism and suture solidarity. I rarely find material that I can clearly determine is a case of virtue vs. evil, oppression vs. empowerment, white vs. black. Actually, I seek out historical cases that blur the simple dichotomies students crave so they can neatly package historical moments or movements within pre-defined ideological boxes marked conservative/right-wing or progressive/left-wing and then, given an individual's own political leanings, label the box good or bad. Exploring the history of anthropology within the context of larger movements in the United States enables students to think differently and critically, and it is an apt way of exploding rigid partisan dualities because the actions and attitudes of anthropologists were often difficult to pin down. For example, was Alice Fletcher being progressive or reactionary in 1885 when she wrote in Hampton's *Southern Workman* that "the three things needed by the Indian" were "Land, Law, [and] Education" (Fletcher 1885: 45)? Although she was campaigning for the disastrous Dawes Severalty Act (1887) and favored "civilizing" the Indians, she was identifying common ground with a post-Reconstruction black audience desperately seeking "land, law, and education."

Was Franz Boas being conservative or progressive when he explained that "the Negro problem will not disappear in America until the Negro blood has been so diluted that it will no longer be recognized, just as anti-Semitism will not disappear until the last vestige of the Jew as Jew has disappeared" (Boas 1921: 395)? In 1921, state governments routinely enforced miscegenation laws buoyed by deep anxieties regarding so-called race mixing. This statement was clearly counter-hegemonic and radical, but it demonstrates a blatant disregard for black culture, and suggests that racism was not a problem. The real "Negro problem," according to Boas here, stemmed from nappy heads and darkish skin.

Documenting how culture is used, deployed, and appropriated, as in the case of the baggy pants, involves detailing a messy dialogical process that involves power and history as well as class and generation. In my research and writing, I strive to identify how anthropology as discourse and discipline helped to shape public understandings of race and culture in the US. Although anthropology has always been the authoritative science of race and culture, it has lacked a concomitant attention to racism and structural inequality. Leith Mullings succinctly and perhaps wryly explains, "Although

anthropologists have written extensively about race, anthropological contributions to the study of racism have been surprisingly modest" (Mullings 2005: 669).

Black Power, White Tolerance

Although I cannot claim that I was a part of the Black Power movement or marched with Martin, I was literally a product of the Black Power movement, being born in the turbulent year of 1966 and, for some reason that I have refused to find out, given up for adoption. I was raised by a loving and liberal white family. It was an extended family where the category "normal" included same-sex and interracial partnerships, and it was common among my closest friends to have siblings, birth parents or adoptive parents who hailed from anywhere in the world. From a young age, have always had strong black men who *were* part of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements as integral parts of my life; they mentored and guided me and instilled in me that the most effective way to fight racism was to work twice as hard and expect half as much as my white counterparts. They also taught me to see and understand the complexity, strength, beauty, and power of African and African American cultures. When I was calling for the revolution, they persuasively argued that the most effective way to fight the power was to beat the white man at his own game.

For better or worse, I am struck with a naive nostalgia for the days when the most effective way to fight racism was to work to achieve excellence, work to achieve justice, and work to achieve more responsive institutions and policies within existing structures of power. In short, I actually believe that we should strive to make the pillars of democracy stand for all Americans. I am mindful that this ideology is situated and positioned within a problematic and deeply flawed rhetoric of racial uplift, betterment, and yes, assimilation. Steeped in rather conservative Christian and capitalist values, it is leavened with equally problematic European aesthetics. Yet, it is worth noting that racial uplift movements have storied traditions of working to better the conditions of workers, alleviate poverty, and put that so-called community before any one individual.

It is, however, the basis for the missionary mentality that assumes that educated elite know what is best for their less educated brethren. For nearly two centuries, this ideology of racial uplift has become a successful strategy of adaptation within the black communities – throughout the diaspora. The ideology of racial uplift is also the sturdy underpinning for ordinances that criminalize young men who, for whatever reason, don't want to pull up

their pants, and it becomes party to a particularly pernicious form of racism that hides behind ideas of color-blind respectability on the one hand, and, on the other, shallow claims that this or that policy is not racist because some of the most progressive citizens of the black community support it. Moments like my experience at the Town & Country Quick Mart exemplify what I refer to as the cultural politics of race. Although many might recognize baggy jeans, fashion, structural racism, and even the debate over the infamous n-word as the narrative stuff that might interest anthropologists, one might wonder what this has to do with writing the history of anthropology.

The way I approach writing the history of anthropology, cultural politics has everything to do with it. Since the late nineteenth century, anthropologists have influenced how people in the United States understand race and culture. Likewise, people in the United States have influenced the way anthropologists have studied and theorized culture and race. In fact, the various changes in the way people have understood both race and culture map fairly closely onto the ways anthropologists have studied and theorized those modalities.

That most Americans conceive of culture in terms of a plural noun, and that many view race in social as opposed to strictly biological terms, can be viewed as evidence to demonstrate that anthropology has played a significant role in the way people in the United States – and beyond – understand both race and culture. The very idea that any one individual or social group should or could practice, embrace, preserve, or celebrate a distinctive culture is predicated upon the notion that a particular social group shares a historical view of the world that can be handed down, in part or whole, to subsequent generations.

Reflections and Inflections

In recent decades, anthropologists have scrutinized the concept of culture; at the same time, however, other disciplines, institutions, foundations, industries, media conglomerates and social groups have institutionalized what can rightly be viewed as a skewed but nevertheless anthropologically inflected idea of culture (Fabian 1983; Clifford 1988; Kahn 1989; Abu-Lughod 1991; Trouillot 1991; Visweswaran 1998; Briggs 2002; Williams 2006). For example, people routinely speak of distinctive corporate or campus cultures, while talk-radio pundits speak glibly about the culture inside the beltway – as if members of Congress were the only people living in Washington, D.C. With the advent of the cochlear implant, some who

craft cultural expression through writing and signing in deaf communities have decried the end of "deaf culture," prompting the National Association of the Deaf to issue a statement recommending that parents of implanted children "receive education in deaf studies, including deaf heritage, history of deafness and deaf people" (National Association of the Deaf 2000).

For better or worse, the concept of culture as most folks in the United States understand it is tethered to what Charles Briggs described as an epistemological land-grab during a period of history when the discursive terrain of the behavioral sciences was literally up for grabs (Briggs 2002: 481). It is important to note, however, that, despite the way anthropological analytics have been appropriated within popular parlance, anthropologists are not alone. Social psychologists have grappled with the way people use or misuse the term identity, sociologists bemoan the fact that the notion of deviance has been sorely overused, economists no longer hold sway over the compound term "cost-benefit," and historians have always been leery of the way people throw around the word history.

I get the critique about bounded and essentialist ideas of culture, and I am often persuaded by the analysis. Moreover, I understand, oh too well, the downside of essentialism, the danger of viewing culture as stuck and timeless, and I personally understand how a static notion of culture can bleed into ideas of authenticity and give life to a ridiculous line of inquiry that turns on a single question: Is Barack Obama black enough? It is this skewed appropriation of anthropologically inflected ideas of culture that sanctions and authorizes the so-called "Soul Patrol," the self-proclaimed culture cops who demarcate rather narrow boundaries of blackness. Even though this criticism of the culture concept is seductive, I still have to agree with that oft-cited observation James Clifford penned twenty years ago: "Culture is a deeply compromised idea I cannot yet do without" (Clifford 1988:10).

This is a productive tension. It is important to note, however, that post-Boasian notions of culture were articulated and conceived to refute the idea that culture is not a series of stages that went from savagery to barbarism and eventually to a state of civilization. More importantly, the arguments were fashioned in a way that did not dilute or diminish the authority of anthropology as the science of race and culture. Despite the fact that anthropology was no longer a reliable narrator in the narrative of white supremacy, Franz Boas and his students were able to dramatically shift perceptions in the United States regarding culture while maintaining their authority and legitimacy over the science of race, language, and culture. Throughout US history, anthropologically informed concepts of culture have been used to advance civil rights and achieve justice, but they have also been employed

to defend segregation and maintain oppression. Many times it is difficult to sort out the intent and intentions from the truth or consequences.

Very little has been written documenting *how* anthropological concepts have been used in the service of political projects (cf. di Leonardo this volume, 1998). One reason that I have chosen to write about this important side of the history of anthropology is to address the paucity. I focus specifically on *how* anthropological concepts, particularly race and culture, have been lovingly adopted by some and disgracefully rejected by others; in each case it is often in the service of a specific political agenda. Although I am interested in the history of theory and institutions, I am simply compelled to uncover and document the many stories that showcase the instances when specific anthropologists or particular anthropological concepts are picked up and used to articulate specific agendas. I have found that these stories are often streeped in contradictions and drip with irony, and almost always have unintended consequences. If I had to summarize the basic question that serves as a framework for my research and writing agenda, it would be: How and why do so-called advocates of specific communities use anthropological concepts of race and culture to advance distinctive political projects?

The III Effects of Mind Poison

One of my favorite stories involves the 1918 congressional hearings that debated the use and abuse of peyote. Members of the Society of American Indians (SAI) squared off against anthropologists in a dramatic fight for the future of Native North America. Smithsonian anthropologist James Mooney took the lead and earnestly claimed "that the use of this plant is not an ordinary habit, [and] it is confined almost entirely and strictly to the religious ceremony, excepting that it is frequently employed also for medicinal purposes" (Peyote Hearings 1918: 69).¹ Aligned with the Temperance movement and committed to both racial uplift and the well being of all American Indians, the Society fielded noted author and educator Zitkala-Ša as their chief witness. Zitkala-Ša was a Yankton Lakota and secretary-treasurer of the organization. She lambasted the well-meaning Mooney and went into great detail about the "ill effects of mind poison," calling "peyote,

[the] twin brother of alcohol, and first cousin to habit forming drugs" (PH 1918: 164). She reported how she witnessed, first hand, the way some members of her community abused peyote, and she had little sympathy for nuanced explanations of complex rituals. She saw it as a drug, like alcohol, that was destroying certain communities and urged Congress to prohibit it.

As an anthropologist and a defender of the First Amendment, I am sympathetic to Mooney's defense of religious freedom and support of those who practiced complex religious ceremonies as an integral part of their daily lives. To make his case, however, he had to paint the Indian activists as not authentic, not tribal, and not "real" Indians. He was emphatic that "an Indian delegate from a sectarian body or alleged uplift organization is not a delegate for his tribe" (PH 1918: 149). Mooney and other well-meaning anthropologists had a very narrow understanding of what constituted real or so-called authentic Indians, which indeed conformed to rather a limited understanding of culture change, adaptation, and the fluidity of identity.

On the other hand, I also understand how the SAI, a progressive organization that shared a mission similar to that of the NAACP, could be concerned with the use and abuse of peyote. What really fascinated me in this case was how the stake-holders aligned. This one hearing mirrored many of the tensions that emerged between proponents of racial uplift movements and the practitioners of putative traditional practices among Native Hawaiians, American Indians, and African Americans. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, anthropology and individual anthropologists played various and conflicting roles as attitudes regarding culture changed over time. These roles were as varied as they were ambivalent, but what emerged was a unique and informative racial politics or culture that often pitted progressive white anthropologists and conservative Indian traditionalists against progressive Indian activists and conservative Christian reformers. The political alliances of the early twentieth century are not unlike the racial politics that emerged in the wake of the battle of the briches in Delcambre, Louisiana in the early twenty-first. The cultural politics of uplift and respectability of the nineteenth century do not diverge much from today's countless skirmishes, ranging from debates regarding the misogyny of hip-hop performances to the effectiveness of school uniforms. These debates play out politically in similar and predictable ways. I have studied anthropologists' role in the so-called culture wars throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and avidly follow contemporary discussions that turn on the culture concept. I am amazed at how they are still fought with such sincerity and alacrity. The somber fact however, is that the foundations of many of these arguments are predicated

¹ Peyote Hearings Before the Subcommittee of the Committee on Indian Affairs regarding House Resolution 2614, February 21, 1918, House Committee of Indian Affairs. Subcommittee Chaired by John N. Tillman, Representing Arkansas' Third District, and hereafter cited as PH.

on a lose-lose premise that neither has an impact on institutionalized racism nor ameliorates structural inequality. Seriously, will pulling up one's pants, wearing khakis on the sideline of an NBA game, or quibbling about the phonemic differentiation between an "a" and an "er" following nigg, really influence the number of men incarcerated, the rate of HIV infections, the amount of lead in the water or the cases of early-onset diabetes? No.

One of the biggest ironies of the case of the baggy pants was that the town council passed this new law in a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) trailer. The township still has not recovered from the devastation wrought by Hurricane Rita, which walloped the Gulf Coast right after Hurricane Katrina decimated New Orleans in 2005, laying bare for the world to see the tenacious and compounding issues of race, racism, and inequality in the United States.

I am perfectly aware that studying the history of anthropology makes an insignificant contribution to the marginal field of history of science. I do not have the immediate, life-saving impact of someone like Paul Farmer. Yet, I still believe my efforts are important for better understanding how racism works. I do so by documenting how even the most progressive social scientists and most thoughtful political activists usually fail to shake loose the noose of racism that constricts and tightens the harder one fights. In the immortal words of India Aire, "There's hope," and I remain optimistic for a better future. Anthropologists, social scientists, and activists have worked together to effect change and fight racism, and have helped to make a better world. It is important to document these efforts too. Anthropologists who strive to be effective change agents must fully understand the limits, but also the possibilities of this crazy field we call anthropology. And that is why I write about it.

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In memory of Gay Becker and Octavia Butler,
original members of this project
They stay close through their words

About the cover art

Observer by Roslyn Zimm

The "observer" in the painting is outside of the painting, looking at Roz as she kneels before the fireplace, favorite paintings on the wall in front of her (Picasso, her friend Elly Rubin). A self-portrait, really, and I like to think the "observer" is myself, watching her, perhaps as a humanist anthropologist observes the world, from afar, but with affectionate concern.

Howard Zimm

Anthropology off
the Shelf:
*Anthropologists
on Writing*

EDITED BY

ALISSE WATERSTON AND
MARIA D. VESPERI

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