This book examines the intersection of cultural anthropology and American cultural nationalism from 1886, when Franz Boas left Germany for the United States, until 1965, when the National Endowment for the Humanities was established. Five chapters trace the development within academic anthropology of the concepts of culture, social class, national character, value, and civilization, and their dissemination to non-anthropologists. As Americans came to think of culture anthropologically, as a complex whole far broader and more inclusive than Matthew Arnold’s “the best that has been thought and known,” so, too, did they come to see American communities as stratified into social classes distinguished by their subcultures, to attribute the making of the American character to socialization rather than birth, to locate the distinctiveness of American culture in its unconscious canons of choice, and to view American culture and civilization in a global perspective.

John S. Gilkeson is Associate Professor of Humanities, Arts, and Cultural Studies at Arizona State University, where his teaching focuses on history and American studies. He has been visiting professor at the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin and has held fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and the Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History. He is the author of Middle-Class Providence, 1820–1940.
To my friend,
Susan Gray

'Tis the gift to be simple,
'Tis the gift to be free,
'Tis the gift to come down where you ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
It will be in the valley of love and delight.

When true simplicity is gained,
To bow and to bend we Shan’t be ashamed.
To turn, turn will be our delight,
'Til by turning, turning we come round right.

(Elder Joseph Brackett, “Simple Gifts”)
Anthropologists and the Rediscovery of America, 1886–1965

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Tempe, Arizona
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