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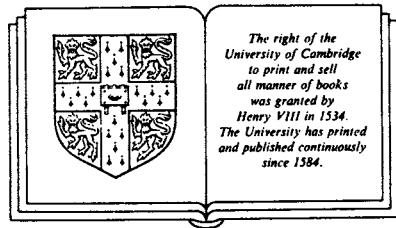
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The anthropology of war

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF WAR

EDITED BY
JONATHAN HAAS

A SCHOOL OF AMERICAN RESEARCH BOOK



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Preface

This volume stems from an Advanced Seminar held at the School of American Research in March, 1986. It represents a cooperative endeavor between the School and the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, which began with a series of conversations between Floyd Ratliff, president of the Foundation, Karen Colvard, its program officer, and me. The Foundation had been funding projects relating to the origins and role of warfare in prestate, “tribal” societies and was interested in integrating this recent research into a wider framework of the anthropology of warfare. The School’s Advanced Seminar program seemed an optimum forum for attempting such an integration. Within this context, the goal of the seminar was to arrive at a better understanding of the causes of both war and peace in prestate societies and the impact of war on the evolution of those societies.

The participants were chosen to represent different theoretical positions, world areas, and perspectives on the phenomenon of prestate warfare. We recognized that in assembling such a diverse group of scholars, there was the potential for dispute, conflict, and lack of communication. However, there was also the possibility for cross-fertilization, synthesis, and resolution of at least some of the disagreements between opposing theoretical positions. In the introductory

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chapter of this volume, Clark McCauley summarizes the week's discussion and outlines the major arguments and eventual points of agreement. He also places the subject matter of the seminar in a wider context of human conflict.

The positions represented in the seminar can be discussed along several dimensions: different models of causation in explaining warfare; the origins versus the maintenance of systems of warfare; and the causes versus the effects of warfare in prestate polities.

The different models of causation in turn can be very roughly divided into three schools of thought: materialist/ecological; biocultural; and historical. Each of these "schools" had a common foundation of agreement, though there was considerable variation within each. The materialist/ecological school, holding that the causes of warfare in tribal societies are to be found largely in the material foundations of the cultural system, was represented at the seminar by Brian Ferguson, Robert Carneiro, and myself. The biocultural school, represented by Napoleon Chagnon and Rada Dyson-Hudson, generally maintained that the causes of warfare were ultimately to be found in a combination of ecological and biological elements. Finally, the historical school, in various dimensions represented by Clayton Robarchek, Thomas Gibson, Thomas Gregor, and Neil Whitehead, argues that the explanation of war is to be found in the specific historical context of the events in question and the personal motivations of the people involved in those events.

Looking at the origins versus the maintenance of warfare in prestate societies, we recognized early in the seminar that the causal factors important in initiating a sequence of armed conflicts may be very different from the reasons for the maintaining warfare once a pattern of conflict has begun. For example, a group suffering from a localized plague of locusts may initiate a cycle of war by raiding another group to acquire corn and squash. In the course of the raid, they kill someone in the prey village. If this village later stages a return raid revenge and retribution would have to be considered in addition to immediate economic variables. Furthermore, with the long-term perpetuation of a cycle of warfare, a complex social and ideological subsystem builds up around the pattern of warfare, and this subsystem to some (arguable) extent carries causal weight itself. Thus, we may have to look to one set of variables to explain the emergence of warfare in a particular area and a

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quite different set of variables to explain the development and maintenance of the pattern of warfare in that area.

Another dimension to the origins-versus-maintenance discussion is the question of why warfare does *not* emerge in some social systems. Not all tribal societies are in a constant state of war, and the reasons for “peace” provide an important perspective on explanations of the causes of war. Although there was some disagreement during the seminar about whether war or peace is the unusual condition needing explanation, we agreed that understanding why peace is maintained in some societies provides considerable insight into why other societies begin and maintain patterns of war. In this volume, Robarchek, Gibson, and Gregor all discuss the maintenance of peace in prestate societies; Haas discusses the transition from a pattern of peace to one of war; and Chagnon, Whitehead and Carneiro address the maintenance of a pattern of warfare. Ferguson crosses the field in offering a model of common causes for both the origins and maintenance of prestate war.

The final major dimension of variability in the seminar was that of causes versus effects of warfare in prestate societies. Although understanding why tribal groups come to fight one another is a critical issue in the anthropology of war, it is also important to know what happens to the social systems as a result of being in a state of war. Warfare has long been argued to play a central causal role in the general evolution of cultural systems, but this role – particularly in a prestate context – has seldom been rigorously examined empirically. In this book, Carneiro and I specifically address the evolutionary role of warfare, my paper in terms of the emergence of tribal systems in the southwestern U.S. and Carneiro’s in terms of complex chiefdoms in Polynesia and Peru.

Assembling the protagonists in this seminar was one task; holding them together and channeling their energy into a constructive discussion was another altogether. Clark McCauley deserves abundant credit for his tact, patience, and authority in his capacity as chairman of the meeting. He guided the debates in productive directions and ensured that the myriad sidelines and tangents were brought back to the central themes of the seminar. I think it helped that he comes from a background in small group psychology. Karen Colvard is due great thanks not only for stimulating the seminar in the first place but also for contributing insightful comments and an alternate voice to the seminar throughout the week. Floyd Ratliff supported and encouraged the

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seminar from its inception and added a thoughtful outside perspective during the “off-hours” of the week. On behalf of all the participants, I would like to express our appreciation to the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation for making it all possible. To Douglas W. Schwartz and the board of managers of the School of American Research, I extend our collective gratitude for providing the supporting environment that made possible an exciting and successful seminar. Finally, we cannot begin to thank Jane Barbarrouse enough for being the most gracious and cooperative hostess, and Sarah Wimett, Jennifer McLaughlin, and Stephen Soule for making our week in the seminar house pleasant, nourishing and comfortable. It is so much easier to hold your attention to the subject at hand when your somatic needs are well cared for.