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ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE PEACE CORPS: AN ASSESSMENT

LAMBROS COMITAS, Ph.D.
Columbia University,
New York City;
Research Institute for
the Study of Man, New
York City.

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The Peace Corps, as judged by both the public and more discerning scientific bodies, has had notable accomplishments in its first two years of existence. It has created a vibrant, dedicated organization which has trained and placed over forty Volunteer units into the field. Under any circumstances, these would be no small achievements, let alone under the severe restrictions of time, staff and experience which were characteristic leitmotifs of the Peace Corps during its formative stage. With the first Volunteers only a few months from returning home, this is a propitious time to examine the past two years, to unravel and digest its lessons and to make whatever adjustments are necessary for the years to come.

This presentation is intended as just one small contribution to such a stock-taking — a personal appraisal of anthropology and the Peace Corps. (1) The formal objectives of the paper are two-fold: first, to gauge the effect of anthropologists on the operations of the Peace Corps; secondly, to explore avenues of more fruitful collaboration between anthropologists and this new agency.

The appraisal which follows is dependent upon a clear understanding of cultural anthropology, that field of anthropology which is most closely related to the Peace Corps. Misconceptions about this field, even among otherwise well-informed individuals, are very wide-spread. One such incorrect stereotype is that the anthropologist is essentially a collector of esoteric facts about
small groups of non-Western and usually primitive peoples; that he is interested in this esoterica for its own sake; and that he has little or no professional interest in the modern world and its problems. Cultural anthropologists, of course, are concerned with the description of a culture, that is, the man-made part of environment. Scientific interest, however, is never restricted to mere enumeration of discrete cultural elements, but rather is the ordering of the phenomena observed so that general propositions and formulations can be reached about a culture as a whole. Furthermore, studies of culture are in no way confined to primitive peoples. Quite the opposite, the overwhelming trend in recent decades is towards research among more complex groups of people — peasants, rural villagers, plantation workers and even urban elements.

Paralleling this broad range of socio-economic types is the anthropologist's regional interest which spans practically every geographical area of the world.

On a higher level of analysis than the purely ethnographic, the anthropologist is concerned with comparative research. He may, for example, compare several different cultures existing at one time level or he may analyze the development of one culture through time. On this supra-descriptive level, he may be primarily concerned with the universal aspects of culture, with regularities and differences between specific cultures, with problems of process and with particulars of social and cultural change. In all of this, his purpose is to formulate broad statements concerning human behavior. More pertinently, his focus may be on the
application of anthropological principles to specific problems and an increasing number of anthropologists have turned their attention to an applied anthropological science with concomitant benefits to both government and industry.

Even from this brief description, it is evident that the scope of cultural anthropology is considerably broader than just a scholarly concentration on the specifics of discrete cultures. The broad diversity of both theoretical and regional subject matter is indispensible to the achievement of the basic purpose of cultural anthropology -- the delineation and systematization of the variables affecting the culture of all peoples. The point which should concern us here is that area knowledge per se is not the end in cultural anthropology but only the means for the attainment of this basic purpose.

Area knowledge, however, is quite often the only qualification that is sought from the anthropologist by government and similar agencies. His science, his systematic view of different cultures, his work on problems of change are often neglected by the hard pressed administrator. This is sometimes the case with the Peace Corps. I suggest here that it is an artificial division which identifies the anthropologist as only an area resource person and it may very well hinder the contribution that he can make to common goals.

If the artificial distinction between resource person and social scientist be kept in mind, we can proceed to the substantive
issues. The first question raised is to what quantitative extent have anthropologists participated in Peace Corps activities? A conservative estimate would place the number in any way involved with the Peace Corps at about 75,\(^{(2)}\) or approximately one out of every ten trained cultural anthropologists in this country. This number exceeds by far the total number of anthropologists employed by any one federal agency and it approaches the total number in all of government service. On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of these Peace Corps connected anthropologists do not have a permanent or continuous affiliation with the agency. Nevertheless, for crude comparison, in October 1958, the estimated number of anthropologists in permanent Federal service was 105 [Lantis 1961:37]. If we exclude archeologists and physical anthropologists from this figure, we can be reasonably certain that there were only between 50 and 60 individuals in government at that time with training in cultural anthropology. There is no evidence that these figures have increased substantially since then. We can be rather certain, therefore, that despite the occasional nature of anthropological participation in Peace Corps activities, its cumulative effect on that agency must be greater than on any other government agency, especially those agencies concerned with foreign affairs. It would seem that the Peace Corps decided positively on the value of anthropology to its operations although, as we shall see, this decision was differentially implemented by each of its pertinent divisions.
This brings us to the second question: what functions have anthropologists performed for those divisions of the Peace Corps which have utilized their services — the Division of Training, the Office of Program Development and Operations, the Division of Evaluation and the Division of Research?

DIVISION OF TRAINING

The primary responsibility of the Division of Training is to prepare for specified tasks in specified countries those individuals who have volunteered for Peace Corps service. This Division exercises direct supervision over trainees for approximately their first two months in the Peace Corps, relinquishing its authority once the Volunteer begins work overseas. The Division of Training has no responsibility for developing or administering the overseas program. Probably the most important single task of the Division is the selection and supervision of educational institutions which contract to organize complete courses of study for the trainees before they leave the United States. From the outset, the Division has encouraged these institutions to be flexible and experimental with training curricula and has continuously emphasized the need for intensive Area Studies preparation. In many cases, institutions have been selected on the basis of their known specialization in a particular world region and generally, anthropologists have been closely connected with such organizations. Areal emphasis in training programs has resulted in a close academic-like relationship between the Division and anthropologists. Even a cursory examination of the syllabi of the various Peace Corps training programs
reveals that the teaching of Area Studies has been dominated by anthropologists.

One Division of Training estimate accounts for fifty such professionals who have taught in this training component and this does not include the linguists with anthropological training who have served as language instructors. However, even if we exclude the linguists, fifty is a gross underestimate. I can personally attest to at least fifteen other bona fide anthropologists having lectured in training programs throughout the country. (3) For all practical purposes, then, the Division of Training has had at least nominal jurisdiction over almost all anthropologists who have had any connection with the Peace Corps.

As part of training faculties, the anthropologists' primary function has been to teach the culture, language and social structure of the countries to which Volunteers are assigned. A secondary and very minor function has been administrative. For at least two projects, (4) anthropologists have served as Project Coordinators, organizing and supervising the entire training cycle. In the main, however, anthropologists have acted as resource persons, in the sense specified above, responsible for the meaningful transmission of area knowledge to trainees. Considering the jurisdiction of the Division, this is the only available role since, generally, by the time they are invited to join an institutional training staff, the overseas program has already been negotiated and detailed. Within this
framework, the work of anthropologists and colleagues in Area Studies has been consistently effective. In the majority of training projects, both Peace Corps officials and Volunteers have rated Area Studies very highly and Evaluation Officers visiting overseas work sites are often told by Volunteers of the pertinence of particular Area Studies courses. (5)

During the past two years, therefore, there has been close cooperation and understanding between anthropologists and Division of Training officials. Two principal reasons account for this productive relationship. First, the senior officers of this Division have been recruited from academic life [Textor 1962:2] and are consequently familiar with social science, with many of its practitioners and with its potential for training. Secondly, when these officials were first faced with the problem of organizing instruction in the way of life of many disparate groups of non-Western people, it soon became obvious to them that anthropology was the only social science that systematically developed students with long-term, grass-roots experience in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Oceania and other regions of immediate concern to the Peace Corps. Anthropology has been able to fill an extremely pivotal training need.

With regard to further collaboration between Training and anthropology, I suggest that training programs be organized with area studies as a central theme running through all other training components. In the one training program, (6) to my knowledge, where this was deliberately planned and where personnel who know the
area taught nearly every segment of the curriculum, the results were most salutary and the implications for other training projects were most clear. If personnel of the requisite quality could be located, it would be rewarding to mount a controlled comparison between area-coordinated curricula and the present more segmented course of training.

THE OFFICE OF PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND OPERATIONS

The Office of Program Development and Operations is responsible for initiating, developing and administering the overseas projects of the Peace Corps. It is a most pivotal and important office: the successful execution of its responsibilities is absolutely necessary for the ultimate success of the Peace Corps. A badly programmed project or inferior overseas administration erases the highly professional efforts of Recruiting, Training and Selection. Since this is the Office most closely associated with the field situation, one might expect to find the greatest use of anthropologists. This is not the case. There are no anthropologists permanently attached to the Washington staff. Only one such professional is employed by this Office overseas as a deputy country representative in Latin America. Another held a country representative's post in Southeast Asia but has since returned. Only a handful of others, perhaps two or three, have acted as consultants for limited periods of time. For the most part, the backgrounds of the officials of PDO are in government or in law.
If one accepts the premise that anthropologists are particularly well suited for both project development and field administration because of their area background and their scientific interests, it is interesting to speculate why they have been so little utilized. One obvious problem for PDO is that capable anthropologists are now in short supply in the United States. This, however, does not appear to be an insurmountable barrier. A more plausible explanation is offered by Textor [1962:2] in a recent letter to the profession.

Top officials in the Program Office have come largely from program planning positions in I.C.A. (now the Agency for International Development). They tend to favor an economist's and administrator's approach, and to de-emphasize the importance of knowing the area, culture, or language.

The Latin American Regional Office is a partial exception to this statement, as Textor also has indicated.

While administrators and anthropologists may not be completely incompatible in terms of temperament, their approaches are at some variance. Generally, the administrator is more immediately goal-oriented, more attuned to the solution of everyday problems and less concerned with long range issues. Anthropologists, like other scientists, have traditionally stressed the search for knowledge and the ordering of this knowledge into meaningful patterns [Foster 1962:242] before the attainment of finite goals. There is a problem here; scholarly goals and administrative necessity are not analogous. Nevertheless, given the circumstances of the Peace Corps, a unique grass roots experiment in American foreign relations, a viable fusion between the scientific and administrative approach must be sought. The reasons for this
are clear. The Peace Corps is now active on a world wide basis; programming personnel can have only a minimal knowledge of many of the territories for which they are responsible and in some cases they may not know the area at all. In addition, field directors are often new to their surroundings and if they did not attend the project training program in the United States, they may be less aware of the local socio-cultural matrix than are the Volunteers themselves. In both cases, assistance of a social scientific order is indicated.

With little or no knowledge of a given country or area, the task of programming a Peace Corps project takes on formidable proportions. Adding to the intrinsic difficulties is the necessity, at least in the first phase of Peace Corps existence, for extremely rapid project exploration and negotiation in order to place Volunteers quickly into the field. This combination of factors allows the greatest latitude for potential difficulties. During a short period of a week or two that a Program Officer spends in a new country, he has little or no opportunity to assess the motivations of the host government, to judge the potential reaction of the local civil service and bureaucracy, to map out the specific objectives of the project, all in addition to roughing out the mechanics of such a project, the number, variety and placement of the skills requested and the logistics necessary for maintenance. 7)

Nevertheless, it is not enough to provide just the working arrangements for a specified number of Volunteers; it is imperative that the Program Officer assure a host country atmosphere which
will allow Volunteers to be of the greatest objective benefit without jeopardizing the appreciation of the major segments of the population. Projects overseas have to be conceived as organized social entities intruding and operating in a number of widely differing socio-cultural contexts and not merely as a collection of disparate individuals placed in particular, occupational niches. Planning for such projects requires thorough area familiarity in addition to an understanding of theory and practice in social and cultural change. It cannot be overstressed that careful and insightful programming is an absolute prerequisite for successful field operation and that the efforts of every other division of the Peace Corps hinges around this fact.

On the operational level, there are also repercussions if a single-minded administrative approach is followed. On occasion, country representatives or deputies are appointed with neither area nor social scientific grounding. They are more prone, despite other admirable attributes, to deal with field problems which have developed between Volunteers and host country personnel because of social structural incompatibility or misunderstanding on an individualistic or personality level rather than on the sociological which gets to the crux of such a situation. I submit an example of this type of thing which I do not believe is completely unique in Peace Corps experience. Recently I received a circular letter from a married couple who had just returned from the Peace Corps. They explained their overseas experiences as follows:

[We] then began working as two of four Volunteers in the...Library Service, the island-wide public library system whose catalog and cataloging processes we were
assigned to bring up to date. Most unfortunately, the director of the system is a sort of madwoman who cannot bear to have persons with much library knowledge near her. The result was that our actions were intentionally misinterpreted, and threats were made which were so drastic that we were literally forced out of the country. The Peace Corps was anxious to assign us elsewhere, but none of the current possibilities seemed to call for our qualifications, so we reluctantly gave up our status as Volunteers.

The decision made by PDO to accede to the demands of the foreign library director that the Volunteers be removed from the country can be categorized as a personality level judgment. By placating this politically well-connected person, it was thought that a lost equilibrium would be reestablished and that the matter would be settled. The basic structural problem of counterpart jealousy, however, had not been solved and this particular decision prepared the ground for further difficulties. In addition to the morale problem which resulted from the removal of the two most qualified and most highly motivated Volunteers from the Project, it allows the group to be further manipulated in this fashion for the remainder of their service in this particular country. Aside from the fact that two Volunteers are cruelly punished for the crime of doing their job well under trying circumstances, it puts the entire project in jeopardy. Operational decisions of this sort to be consistently correct require a great deal of what the late C. Wright Mills called "the sociological imagination" [Mills 1961] to which I would add the ability to think in terms of host country values, norms and structure.

It is patently impossible, for every project to be developed or administered with the continuous assistance of an anthropologist
or similar social scientists. As a matter of fact, as the experience of Peace Corps personnel overseas increases, there will be less need for the anthropologist's services. However, it does seem desirable, from the point of view of minimizing present-day field problems and providing expert opinion on project development and direction, that anthropologists and comparative sociologists be more closely integrated into the activity of PDO. I visualize this integration in the form of four regional committees of social scientists, one for each of the four regional divisions made by PDO. These small committees of three or four members could be selected on the basis of proven area competence and interest in the problems of change in underdeveloped territories. In collaboration with PDO officials, they could advise on the location, type and size of projects within their respective regions. They could serve as a board of objective advisors to the regional directors on structural problems of the type discussed above. At relatively small cost and minimal organizational disruption, PDO could assure itself of a regular professional service which, at present, is only available in a sporadic and rudimentary use of individual consultants.

With regard to field administration, it would appear sensible that, if country representatives and their deputies do not possess area competence and/or a background in the social sciences, every effort should be exerted before departure overseas to assure a maximum amount of such training. There have been projects where Volunteers, who do not make the major administrative decisions overseas, have received exhaustive training in these subjects while
their field leaders have had no time for any such instruction. At the very least, this personnel should be rigorously required to attend the United States training program for Volunteers and they should be specifically directed to seek more explicit information, advice and instruction from area experts. The regional committees proposed above might also serve in this regard. Aside from the obvious administrative dividends of such required training, it would also tend to systematize the feedback of information from the field. It appears that quite often reports from country representatives are of a detailed but anecdotal form. This type of presentation does not allow for easy comparison with other projects or for the accumulation of organized data for evaluative purposes. Hence the experience gained from the problems of yesterday are of little avail for the solution of the problems of today.

DIVISION OF EVALUATION

In the Division of Evaluation, there has been at least a desire to broaden its own function from the purely reportorial to the more generally evaluative and scientific. This has meant a shift in attitude toward the use of individuals with social scientific skills. In an article in the spring of 1962, the Director of the Peace Corps described Evaluation in this way:

The Peace Corps has an unusual method for seeking out its mistakes. In our Office of Planning and Evaluation we have hired ex-newspaper reporters to work as evaluators. Their job is to poke their noses systematically under each Peace Corps tent to see what is happening. They report directly to me. This built-in safeguard has aided us in spotting mistakes quickly. [Shriver 1962:23].
In the autumn of the same year, however, a conference called by the Division of Evaluation to discuss divisional problems shifted somewhat from this position. The opening paragraph of the conference report makes this clear:

If one suggestion can be said to have dominated the conference, it was this: Evaluation should move toward the learning of generally applicable lessons from the Peace Corps' experience and away from seeking action on specific problems [Report on Evaluation Conference 1962].

The conference went on to discuss ways of improving evaluation techniques. Suggestions were then made to obtain assistance from the Division of Research in standardizing questioning techniques with Volunteers, standardizing reporting methods and obtaining sampling plans and to separate factual observations and reporting from personal interpretation. In all of this one sees a shift from a trouble-shooting approach to an objective, evaluative position.

Staffing has posed problems for the Division of Evaluation. The basic question revolves around whether specialists or non-specialists should be employed as evaluators. The Chief of the Division makes this pertinent statement: "Many in Training would have us all be Ph.D.'s. Many in PDO would have us be former AID mission directors" [Peters n.d.:4]. The earliest position on staffing was that there was no one discipline that could cover all Peace Corps activity and that those individuals who had greatest contact with Volunteers in all phases of the Peace Corps cycle had the greatest claims to being an "expert" on this subject. The Chief of the Division goes on to say:
Beyond this kind of expertise, I think we should be very cautious about how far we go down the expert road. It must be remembered that we are not reporting to experts. In other words, neither the Director, nor the Associate Directors, nor the Division Chiefs to whom we report can qualify as experts in more than a very modest number of technical and geographic areas in which the Peace Corps operates. Our policy of seeking lawyers with litigation experience and newspapermen gives us as evaluators the people most qualified to develop facts for non-experts [Peters n.d.:4].

However, the position of the Division Chief is considerably modified by his espousal of the use of part-time evaluators who can provide professional evaluation of language instruction and the like and who as a result of their experience on these trips and of their expertise, will be able to advise us on how to make our inquiry into their respective areas more sophisticated and more illuminating.[Peters n.d.:5].

With this modification, the Division Chief's position comes closer to my own and to the one widely held in applied anthropology [Barnett 1956; Foster 1962; Gladwin 1956; Spicer 1952]. The present situation, then, involves a core group of five or six non-specialists who are full-time employees and an almost equal number of expert consultants who are often called upon to evaluate both training programs and overseas projects. Among these consultants are at least one anthropologist and four other social scientists. Structurally, this approaches my previous suggestion of regional advisory committees for PDO.

The Division of Evaluation is a microcosm well worth more intensive study since it reflects quite faithfully the major problems of the Peace Corps itself. One of the most important of
these problems is the question of how to judge the success of
Peace Corps work.

A final criticism of Evaluation is that we have no
criteria for judging the success of training or
overseas projects. To the extent this is a legitimate
criticism, I think it can be applied with equal justice
to our Training Division and PDO [Peters n.d.: 6].
The Division of Evaluation has an extremely difficult and thankless
task here in that the formal objectives of the Peace Corps as stated
in the Peace Corps Act [cf The Peace Corps n.d.: 25] are of a very
general order. With various projects overseas employed in a variety
of complex occupations, systematic evaluation of overall success
becomes an almost Herculean task.

One step towards solving this problem is a much closer
coordination between PDO, Training and Evaluation so that the
finite goals and objectives of each project are decided upon
before a group is assembled for training. Finally, since the
trend of the Evaluation Division appears to be more towards the
accumulation and analysis of comparative data, an integrated
working relationship with the Division of Research seems essential.
Evaluation Officers, both specialists and non-specialists, are the
only regular Peace Corps personnel that have access to all Volun-
teers throughout the two year service period. They can and should
be utilized for on-going basic research projects.
DIVISION OF RESEARCH

The Division of Research is the newest service unit under discussion. Its function is to provide basic information which will "improve the selection and training of Volunteers and make their work overseas more effective [Peace Corps Handbook n.d.:19]." Reliance here is on contracts with institutions and individual researchers for the solution of specific problems and for the accumulation of specified data. It deals, consequently, almost entirely with the social sciences. Anthropology is represented by Professor W.H. Hutchinson of the University of Florida, who is directing a research project in the Sao Francisco Valley of Brazil on the impact of the Peace Corps in this region [Heath 1963:1] and by Professor Morris Stein, a social psychologist from New York University, who will employ anthropologists for village studies in Colombia.

The results of these and other projects in the future should be of great assistance in more comprehensive programming, training and evaluation. A relationship of this kind, whereby the researcher is not administratively connected to the Peace Corps, has advantages, as demonstrated by the British Colonial Office use of anthropologists in Africa over the past half-century. The problem for the Division of Research will be to diffuse effectively throughout the Peace Corps the recommendations which will result from these studies.

* * *

Unfortunately, anthropologists have generally considered their contribution to the Peace Corps to be almost entirely related
to the training function. As it has been put in a recent letter in the Fellows Newsletter of the American Anthropological Association, "Indeed, this has proven to be the most important single means by which anthropologists can help the Peace Corps [Textor 1962:2]." The few other public pronouncements by anthropologists on the Peace Corps have generally centered around the value of anthropology for training purposes [Smith 1963; Heath 1963]. Scott Gilbert [1962-1963:287] calls on anthropologists to provide "the type of information needed by a foreigner who must deal with, interact with, and understand the behavior of nationals of a host country in everyday situations." As we are informed a few sentences further, the material to be gathered is "information which is not available, in any single instance, to the government to pass on to orientees proceeding to an area of new assignment." The primary use of such information collected by anthropologists is obviously for training.

There are several obviously interrelated reasons which account for this singlemindedness. Anthropologists are, of course, academics, thoroughly familiar with the teaching role. Secondly, the Division of Training is the only one which has genuinely sought them out; no other division has made any such systematic effort. As anthropologists, they understand Training and they feel welcome. This is not always the case with other divisions. We are told in the same letter to the profession about possibilities for employment in the Peace Corps:
Experience so far indicates that the anthropologist's main chance lies in demonstrating language and area competence. I would suggest that your letter and vita describe this fully, and refrain from any undue emphasis upon the relevance of anthropology as a discipline [Textor 1962:2].

I too believe training to be a thoroughly vital contribution which deserves full support but this role should not remain the anthropologist's exclusive contribution. Anthropologists, as noted above, can assist in a number of other ways and without having to hide the relevance of their profession as a discipline.
(1) Much of the data pertinent for an exhaustive study is not available and the little that is has not yet been systematically collected or analyzed. Consequently, I have placed heavy reliance on material I personally collected during my year and a half long association with the Peace Corps as an Area Studies Coordinator (St. Lucia Project—Iowa State University), as a Training Project Director (Jamaica Project—Research Institute for the Study of Man), and as a Consultant (Office of Program Development and Operations and Office of Planning and Evaluation). Supplementing information and insights gained through these personal experiences is material gathered from formal and informal discussions with fellow social scientists familiar with Peace Corps activities as well as with staff personnel from the agency.

(2) I base much of this estimate on a list of anthropologists who have been involved in Peace Corps training programs, kindly provided by the Division of Training. Grateful acknowledgment is herewith made.

(3) For example, seven anthropologists not clearly identified by profession in the syllabus and final report of the Jamaica Project were not included in the estimate provided by the Division of Training.

(4) Allan H. Smith, Ecuador Project, Washington State University and Lambros Comitas, Jamaica Project, Research Institute for the Study of Man.

(5) The writer has personally experienced this at overseas worksites.

(6) Jamaica Project, Research Institute for the Study of Man, New York City, April 2nd–May 31st 1962.

(7) The names of the two former Volunteers and the host country they served in have been deliberately deleted by the writer.
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THE PEACE CORPS  