

Conclusion

Postscript: Migration, Migrants, and Biological Anthropology

Anthropology is the study of people. All people are migrants. Therefore, anthropology is the study of migrants. Biological anthropology studies the effects of migration on human physiology, morphology, population genetic structure, demography, health and well-being, and more. Human, or at least hominid, migration began when our ancestors left Africa in one or more waves of population dispersal. Even earlier, population movement within Africa churned the biocultural diversity of that continent for more than one million years and still does so today. The flow out of Africa had biological effects on people almost immediately. Colder temperatures in Europe seem to have altered tropical body proportions by shortening legs relative to total stature. It is still debated if this was a direct consequence of the cold or if it was an effect mediated by changes in diet and physical activity (Bogin and Rios, 2003). Latitudinal variation in the intensity of solar radiation, combined with new diets, new clothing, and outdoor exposure, intensified selection for various shades of skin pigmentation (Jablonski and Chaplin, 2000). Old disease vectors were left behind, but new ones were confronted and the selection of new genotypes and behavioral phenotypes resistant to disease continued apace.

Astute observers took note of biocultural differences between human groups since at least the time of the ancient Egyptians. It took European Colonialism to spur an effort to systematically organize and hierarchically arrange human variation. Those efforts culminated in the racial pseudo-science of the 18th and 19th centuries. One major counter-attack to "race science" came from several migrants to the New World, especially Franz Boas, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Mascie-Taylor and Little, this volume).

World Wars, holocausts, industrialization, urbanization, and other socio-political upheavals in the 20th century served to intensify the process of human migration. By mid-century, migration studies were the bread-and-butter of a coterie of anthropologists, including Gabriel Lasker and his wife Bernice Kaplan. Lasker, Kaplan, Goldstein, Shapiro, and others were able to show,

perhaps more fully than Boas may have suspected, the nature of human biological plasticity in response to migration.

Today, we who continue with the research are the intellectual descendants of Boas and Lasker. We still discuss the merits and meaning of population biological markers ranging from morphology of the skull (Relethford, this volume) to stature and chest size (Weitz and Garruto, this volume). We add to the mix of migration research some population biology markers that were unknown to Boas and largely unavailable to Lasker, such as nuclear and mitochondrial DNA (Schurr and Sherry; Cann and Lum, this volume). We have not forgotten the broad and deep anthropological roots of our past, as we remind everyone of that most anthropological of all topics, kinship, and its role in migration and human diversity (Fix, this volume).

Early in the 21st century we live under fear and suspicion of migrants and migration. Refugees, immigrants, drifters, tourists, and students from abroad may bring disease, death, and destruction. Foreign military forces fight and fraternize with local populations around the globe. Globalization of industrial and agricultural production on the one hand and markets for the distribution of goods on the other hand bring all human beings within contact. This interchange and interdependence is both biological and cultural at the same time. Anthropology has a unique focus on the biocultural nature of people and a formidable history of migration research. Because of this, biological anthropologists have both the skills and the responsibility to replace the fears of migration and migrants with tempered understanding.

LITERATURE CITED

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