AMERICAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO ANTHROPOLOGY

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AMERICAN anthropology has been in large measure shaped by its opportunities, which implied duties. The New World presented an apparently distinct variety of the human species with great physical, linguistic and ecological diversity. After their discovery these indigenes were threatened at times with extinction or miscegenation, everywhere with a possible obliteration of their mode of life. The obvious task was “to save vanishing data.” As a result sheer collection or description bulks large in American anthropology. One thinks of the impressive series of annual reports and bulletins issued since 1879 by the Bureau of American Ethnology; the vast collections of crania and skeletons amassed by the late Dr. A. Hrdlička in the U. S. National Museum; the intensive reports on Californian tribes due to A. L. Kroeber and his disciples.

Of course, Americans have not shied away from other areas on principle. Honolulu, with its Bishop Museum, has been a natural spring-board for Oceanian investigations, and other institutions have now and then financed transoceanic research. A. B. Lewis, Margaret Mead, Hortense Powdermaker have studied Papuans and Melanesians; Martha Beckwith, H. L. Shapiro, E. W. Gifford, Ralph Linton are associated with various Polynesian projects; Wm. Lloyd Warner and D. S. Davidson have, respectively, investigated Australian sociology and technology; Raymond Kennedy, E. M. Loeb, Cora DuBois are specializing in Indonesia; and George Herzog, Melville J. Herskovits, Wm. R. Basecom are reckoned Africanists. However, in the nature of the case most of us have remained predominantly Americanists.

Our saturation with the concrete data of the New World has given a distinct flavor to American work during the last half century. To outsiders we have