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Health and Ethnicity. Edited by H. Macbeth & P. Shetty. Pp. 256. (Taylor & Francis, London, 2001.) £19.99, ISBN 0-415-24167-7, paperback.

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Book reviews

Health and Ethnicity. Edited by H. Macbeth & P. Shetty. Pp. 256. (Taylor & Francis, London, 2001.) £19.99, ISBN 0-415-24167-7, paperback.

DOI: 10.1017/S0021932003215509

'It is almost trite to note that the risk of disease varies by time and place,' begins Ward (Chapter 8, p. 88). However, although clear differences in health status exist between human populations, as soon as one starts to dig deeper, all sorts of difficulties and complexities arise. How should 'populations' or 'ethnic groups' be defined? While the notion of simple categories ('races') based on clear genetic differences has now long since been rejected, we are left with a distinct lack of consensus concerning the relative contribution of biological (genetic), social and cultural dimensions in our understandings of ethnicity. Even more problematic is the attempt to distinguish what may be rather arbitrary boundaries between 'ethnic groups'. Many of the debates around these issues take on political significance as charges of racism and blame are brought to bear. 'Health' is another notoriously slippery concept, and attempts to reach satisfactory universal definitions of health and illness that apply cross-culturally have proved to be well-nigh impossible.

It is, therefore, both a brave and a timely endeavour to put together a multi-disciplinary collection of papers on the subject of health and ethnicity. At no point does the book shy away from confronting head-on the many complexities and ambiguities involved. Indeed, it begins with two very thought-provoking chapters, by Macbeth and Bhopal respectively, that encourage the reader to consider very carefully what the terms ethnicity and race mean, particularly within the context of health.

Many of the other chapters then try to tease apart the relative contributions of different factors – genetic, ecological, socioeconomic and cultural – in explaining health differences between ethnic groups, however defined. Disentangling different explanatory factors is far from straightforward. Nazroo and Davey Smith (Chapter 4), for example, show that differences in socioeconomic status can explain a large proportion of health differentials between ethnic groups in the UK and USA. However, they also suggest that the underlying cause of socioeconomic differences may lie in cultural institutions of racism. Several other chapters grapple with the relative importance of genetic variation between ethnic groups, as opposed to differences in culture or social history, in explaining inter-population differences in the incidence and prevalence of particular illnesses, such as hypertension (Chapter 8), diabetes (Chapter 10), cardiovascular disease (Chapter 12) and cancer (Chapter 13). Again, disentangling the explanatory variables proves difficult. For example, as Shetty (Chapter 11) points out, genetic variations may only manifest themselves as disease risks under particular environmental conditions. Some suggestions for ways forward are offered, such as the study of migrated and admixed populations (e.g. McKeigue, Chapter 9).

One slight disappointment, in this otherwise excellent volume, is the lack of proper attention paid to cultural differences in the meanings and felt experiences of health and illness. Chapter 5 provides a good discussion of these issues with regard to diverse populations. However, while 'ethnicity' and 'race' are constantly problematized throughout the volume, the standard biomedical definitions of 'health' are accepted unquestioningly in most papers, with the exceptions of Chapter 5 and Chapter 13, on mental health. This is a missed opportunity and, while no book can do everything, and the editors are clear that their aim is essentially to explain ethnic diversity in 'biomedically measurable health definitions', it rather contradicts their other stated aim: to bridge the gap between different biological and social sciences in their contributions to the topic of health and ethnicity.

That said, this is a superb volume, containing many first-rate papers that constantly challenge the reader to think through issues that become more and more complex the deeper one goes. The editors warn us that we should not expect to find simple answers to straightforward questions, and they are quite right: the reader is left with many more questions than answers by the end of the volume. However, this is, perhaps, the book's greatest strength, and will encourage the reader to think and explore the topics further.

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Nutrition and Health in Developing Countries. Edited by Richard D. Semba & Martin W. Bloem. (Humana Press, Totowa, NJ, USA, 2001.) US \$125, ISBN 0-896-03806-8, hardback.

DOI: 10.1017/S0021932003225505

A splendid array of internationally respected researchers have contributed to this book, which forms part of the impressive 'Nutrition and Health Series' published by Humana Press. The underlying theme of the book is the relationship between nutrition and infection, and the editors have done well to use the chapters to demonstrate, in a refreshingly multidisciplinary manner, the complex nature of this interaction.

The chapters in the book fall into three interrelated sections. The first section (Chapters 2–10) addresses some of the major public health problems in developing countries including maternal mortality, low birth weight, infant mortality, child growth and development, diarrhoeal disease, acute respiratory infection, measles, malaria, TB and HIV/AIDS. The middle section (Chapters 11–16) focuses on specific nutritional disorders including deficiencies in vitamin A, zinc, iron and iodine, as well as multi-micronutrient deficiencies and protein energy malnutrition in childhood. Most chapters in these first two sections contain epidemiological data as well as information on the prevention and treatment of the specific health problems, paying special reference to nutritional interventions. Many chapters also highlight areas that require further research. The third section (Chapters 17–21) evaluates the relationship between population change, and health and nutrition, and also assesses the challenges facing policy-makers attempting to address nutrition and health problems.

The book opens with a fascinating historical perspective by Richard Semba on the interaction between nutrition and development, and is concluded with a thought-provoking essay by David Pelletier on the necessity to broaden current views on research and policy in order to best tackle the multidimensional problems in the field of public health and nutrition.

As with many multi-authored works, the writing style is a little uneven: there are some beautifully crafted entries, while there are others that are rather more laborious to read. There are also numerous examples of overlap between the chapters. Much of this overlap is stated by the editors to be 'purposeful', and is the result of the two-way interaction between nutrition and infection. However, some of the overlap is less interesting. For example, the NCHS/WHO reference data for child growth and the definitions of wasting and stunting are discussed on no less than three separate occasions. Many of the figures are also rather disappointing; some are too small for easy reading, while others have been poorly reproduced. However, all chapters are extensive and present abundant references: a superb fund of information for further reading.

The enormous scope and diversity of this book makes it an ideal resource for graduates and researchers in the fields of public health and nutrition. Indeed, the mixture of biological, clinical, demographic and social perspectives results in a book that will be of interest to readers from a wide range of disciplines. However, to be truly accessible to those who might need it most, such as health workers in developing countries, this book will need to be considerably cheaper!

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Biologists and the Promise of American Life. By Philip J. Pauly. Pp. 312. (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, USA, 2001.) £18.95, ISBN 0-691-04977-7, hardback. DOI: 10.1017/S0021932003235501

In his new book, Philip J. Pauly, an historian of science, continues a theme established in his insightful *Controlling Life: Jaques Loeb and the Engineering Ideal in Biology* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1987). The theme concerns the rise of the current approach to biology: a science controlling and changing life rather than describing nature. Although biology, like all natural sciences, purports to be an objective reflection of the natural world, it is in reality a reflection of our social attitudes in a series of examples taken from nature. Thus, the history and the social philosophy of the time and place determine the way in which a particular branch of science develops.

In this book, Philip Pauly presents the cultural history of American biology beginning in the early 19th century with the work of naturalists who 'discovered' the West – a vast universe of prairies, rivers and mountains – making it available for European conquest. Then comes the age of grand theories, prominent among them the Darwinian theory of evolution, and great personalities such as Asa Gray and Louis Agassiz, followed by attempts at applying biology for national development

through support for the national economy by government naturalists. Slowly biology finds its place in the US national culture, entering high school curricula and establishing its own centres of academic life, Woods Hole prominent among them. The early 20th century sees biology absorbed into the mainstream of national culture through eugenics and sex education, which lead to disparate results: the demise of eugenics and the development of effective methods of birth control and the sexual liberation of people of various sexual orientations. Later in the 20th century the drive towards application of biology in national life leads to the development of biotechnology, but the author stops there, well before the full impact of the governmental philosophy of directly applied science can be explored. He ends by indicating that biology differs from physical sciences by the depth of its involvement with public life. Products of biological research can affect directly bodies of millions of Americans, thus bringing bioethical issues to the fore of the public debate and establishing the presence of biologists in public life. The book is well referenced and illustrated, making it a useful and thought-provoking contribution to the understanding of the role of a natural science – biology – in shaping the culture of the modern world.

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Obesity: Preventing and Managing the Global Epidemic. Report of a WHO Consultation. WHO Technical Report Series 894. Pp. 252. (World Health Organization, Geneva, 2000.) SFr 56.00, ISBN 92-4-120894-5, paperback.
DOI: 10.1017/S0021932003245508

Obesity is currently one of the fastest emerging public health problems. By describing this emergence as an epidemic, the authors of this report use a tabloid newspaper device to draw attention to an issue that they see as being particularly pressing. Unlike most 'epidemics', this one has largely been met by public apathy, not action, perhaps because this is to some extent a condition of generalized affluence, a very new phenomenon in human history, and traditionally a marker of individual success in many societies.

However, while the title might over-dramatize the issue, there have been very consistent trends towards increased levels of fatness and obesity in many parts of the world, and there is clear need for public health activity to stabilize or reverse this trend. This report is the end product of the World Health Organization (WHO) Consultation on Obesity that met in 1997 to review current epidemiology of obesity and to prepare recommendations for the development of public health policies and programmes for the prevention and management of obesity.

The volume consists of five parts, the first of which reviews the literature on various definitions and classifications of obesity, and describes the global prevalence of obesity and secular trends in body fatness according to WHO regions: Africa, Europe, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific. In the second part, the health and economic consequences of overweight and obesity are considered, as are the health benefits and risks of weight loss. In part three, the Consultation on Obesity reviews

the factors which influence the development of overweight and obesity, while part four is a consideration of how prevention and management of obesity might best be undertaken, at both the level of the population and the individual. Part five is a brief summary of all earlier sections, and has extensive recommendations for the global prevention and management of obesity. Among these recommendations are priority areas for further research, a large list which suggests that there is still much to learn about obesity, despite several decades of biomedical research. In general, the volume is clearly written, and carries a wealth of summary information that is likely to be invaluable for anyone interested in the public health aspects of obesity and fatness, be they student, practitioner or researcher.

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Skull Wars: Kennewick Man, Archaeology, and the Battle for Native American Identity.

By David Hurst Thomas. Pp. 326. (Basic Books, New York, 2000.) £17.99, ISBN 0-465-09224-1, hardback.

DOI: 10.1017/S0021932003255504

The often farcical, always tragi-comic custody battle over the remains of Kennewick Man would have had no impetus whatsoever without the explosive ideological dispute behind it by groups who wish to prove that he was, or was not, Native American. In this volume David Hurst Thomas, a senior American archaeologist, attempts the difficult feat of interpreting the political, ideological and scholarly background to the dispute. Despite the book's title, the remains of the ancient man with 'Caucasoid' features discovered on an eroding bank of the Columbia River in 1996 do not feature much in the text; nor do the bizarre twists and turns of the battle between archaeologists, Native American groups, and the Army Corps of Engineers over the disposition of the remains. Rather, the arguments swirling around Kennewick Man serve to frame a political and intellectual history of the ways in which Native Americans have been studied, interpreted and generally used by non-Native scholars literally since 1492.

Thomas gives a sweeping overview of the deeply problematic relations between scholars, government and Native Americans, which have led to their mutual distrust and the standoff over these remains. The ideological nature of American national history narratives, and the ways in which the professions of anthropology and archaeology have supported these in justifying the establishment of dominance over Native Americans, becomes part of the central thread of Thomas' explanation of the essential positions of the dispute. This is nothing new, having been stated masterfully by Randall McGuire's 'Archaeology and the First Americans' (McGuire, 1992). The scope of this work is broader, though, exploring the patterned academic control over the right to excavate, interpret and access Native remains and the implications of this for Native-White relations and for American society. Physical anthropology features far less in the book than does archaeology, although the nature, reliability and implications of those 'Caucasoid' cranial features, as well as the development of

Native American resolution to bring their ancestors home from museum shelves for proper burial, are also explored. The volume is particularly valuable for those seeking to understand the broader disputes over whether human remains should be repatriated to descendant groups claiming them, or retained in collections for scientific study.

That the book's foreword is written by the Dakota polemicist Vine Deloria Jr and its royalties are being donated to a fund for Native American archaeologists places Thomas firmly on one side of the dispute. This is a book for the interested non-specialist, and might well be read in tandem with essays in Devon Mihesuah's *Repatriation Reader* (Mihesuah, 2000), which focuses on recent shifts in praxis in dealing with Native American remains. Intriguingly, there is at least one other popularly oriented book that parallels Thomas': Elaine Dewar's *Bones* (Dewar, 2001). Academics will wish to supplement Thomas' book with specialist material on Kennewick Man (much of which remains only available on the Internet). Thomas' *Skull Wars* won't tell you that much about Kennewick Man himself, but it is essential reading for understanding why these remains have generated so much controversy.

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