



FAY-COOPER COLE

1881–1961

The death of Fay-Cooper Cole on September 3, 1961, at Santa Barbara shortly after his 80th birthday came as an unusually disrupting shock, because, somehow, Cole's energy, brimming optimism, and agility of mind held him ageless. He was not old, merely older. After his retirement to Santa Barbara in 1948 his undiminished energy and enthusiasm, along with his general appearance of ruddy good health, intensified the quality of agelessness.

And with Cole's passing, there passed another of the figures who modeled anthropology as it is now understood and taught in some 200 American institutions of higher learning. For most Americans Cole is identified with the Department of Anthropology at the University of Chicago, where he gathered together during the thirties a staff which, along with him, profoundly shaped the content and direction of anthropology as it can now be seen on the American scene. Scarcely any development between 1930 and 1950 lacks a contribution from Cole.

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The influence he exerted on American anthropology was not through research or extraordinary scholarship. Far more, he was an administrator and advocate. What he believed in and what he taught, lectured about, and labored ever to advance was science (of which he had a rigorous conception), excellence, new ideas, and above all, anthropology. It has been said that Cole could have persuaded Satan to install central heating. This is no doubt true; he could do anything he believed to be important. He was sincere, a vital man, who stood tall wherever his varied affairs led.

Born August 8, 1881, Cole was active as an anthropologist from 1899, when he was in the American Southwest on an archaeological expedition, until virtually the hour of his death. He was educated at Northwestern University, the University of Chicago, the University of Berlin, and Columbia University. After he retired, he energetically attacked a backlog of notes, assumed new duties, and initiated new research.

Formal anthropological employment began in 1906 when he became ethnologist for the Field Museum of Natural History. Identified with the Philippines and Malaysia he made long journeys to the field, collecting specimens and studying the remote tribes for the Museum. He and his bride, Mabel Cook, were among the Tinguian in 1906–08, making friends and studying these warlike folk at a time when the misreading of a single tabu sign or a breach of intertribal etiquette spelled death for the stranger.

His active research work for the Museum closed in 1924 when he entered a second career by becoming lecturer in anthropology at the University of Chicago. Here man and task came together. By 1929 he was professor and head of the newly formed Department of Anthropology there, a department established at this particular time because Cole was such a vigorous protagonist of the field.

Honors and responsibilities flowed to him during the University of Chicago phase and continued after retirement. Honorary degrees from Northwestern, University of Chicago, and Beloit College were awarded. He served on the NAS–NRC division of anthropology and psychology from 1927 to 1930, the last year as chairman. He served on countless University of Chicago administrative committees, where he was an insistent exponent of excellence and the need for more and better social science,

particularly anthropology. For two years he was president of the American Anthropological Association; later he was credited by many with having preserved the unity of the Association during the difficult transition and reorganization period just after World War II. He regarded his part in establishing the Social Science Research Council as particularly important. He was, of course a member of many scientific associations. Always, however, his overriding concern was the Department of Anthropology at Chicago. Its growth, quality, and state of intellectual ferment were zealously encouraged.

Cole's role in American archaeology is but one small facet of the achievements of Cole the anthropologist-administrator. By 1927, Chicago students were beginning to search for and excavate prehistoric sites in Illinois. Before 1930, Cole was militantly advocating an upgrading of the quality of field work; he constantly emphasized the value of precision and care in recording. Cole personally took to the field several summers, leading an attack upon the then unknown story of Illinois' prehistoric past. During this work, for which he raised the funds, in the days when philanthropies came from friends instead of foundations, scores of students were indoctrinated. The studies resulted in *Rediscovering Illinois*, 1937, in which Cole, with Thorne Duell, described for the first time the Midwestern sequence of cultures. The volume was a turning point in American archaeology. This was followed in 1951 by *Kincaid; A Prehistoric Illinois Metropolis*, a second report of University of Chicago archaeological field school researches. These two publications are Cole's tangible contributions to American archaeology although his great influence continued. He held the organizational meeting for the Society for American Archaeology in his office. He participated in the formulations resulting in the Midwestern classification of prehistoric cultures to which McKern's name is closely linked. He insisted that dendrochronology was possible in the Middlewest and arranged that it be studied. He encouraged students to go into archaeology at a period in American anthropology when to aspire to be an archaeologist was deemed something less than first-rate intellectual ambition. This interest in archaeology and its advance never lagged. In fact it seemed to intensify; for example in 1956, he gave the major address at the Third Great Basin Anthropological Conference and

again as recently as 1960, in collaboration with Orr, he interested himself in the Santa Rosa mammoth sites and invited a panel of scientists to visit and assess some recent finds there.

As a perennial student at Chicago I did not know Cole as well as I knew some of the other staff members. To me, and to many another student of the '30's, Cole seemed difficult of access. The facts are that this was the period of building the department, the period during which his managerial talents were most needed and most in evidence. In those days he was always moving in haste. He wanted to know what was going on, so he handled much departmental detail himself. At the same time he skillfully participated in campus politics, taught good classes conscientiously, traveled extensively, raised money, helped put on the Chicago World's Fair in 1933, made many lectures interpreting anthropology to laymen, and went to the field several weeks each summer.

His inaccessibility to most of the students was thus real but resulted from lack of time, not from lack of interest. So my student memories are of a bustling friendly professor whose classes I enjoyed, but of whom I stood in considerable awe. Had I overcome this I could have known him better. After leaving Chicago

I rarely saw Cole or heard from him until after his retirement. But during the past decade our paths crossed more frequently and I learned more of his greatness. His loyalty to friends, his tolerance of human frailty, the sincere warmth of his interest in all his students, his zealous belief in the value of anthropology for moderns, and his patience all come into clearer focus. I was, each time we met, amazed at his optimism, his unflagging enthusiasms, and his energy. As a student I keenly appreciated the stimulus of the staff Cole gathered together and led. But while I recognized the administrative genius behind the opportunities made available to Chicago students, my respect for Cole personally was not what he deserved, nor did I appreciate him always for the right reasons.

In closing I can now say, with more awareness, that Cole's influence on American anthropology, both oblique and direct, was tremendous, but not fully realized by many younger men because he chose to build rather than do research and publish widely.

Anthropology has lost a major figure. Even more importantly American archaeology has lost its staunchest supporter. And many have lost a valued friend.

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