

---

WARD H. GOODENOUGH



30 MAY 1919 · 9 JUNE 2013

**A**LTHOUGH RATHER SHORT in physical stature, Ward Goodenough was a towering figure in twentieth- and early twenty-first-century anthropology. Beginning with the publication of his doctoral dissertation, which was revised and published as *Property, Kin, and Community on Truk* in 1951, Goodenough produced numerous path-breaking theoretical works that greatly influenced the direction of the discipline for at least the next half century. In addition to his contributions to anthropological theory, he was also a consummate ethnographer, a gifted linguist, a scholar interested in the practical applications of anthropology, a poet, and an amateur musician.

Born on 30 May 1919 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Ward Goodenough, the eldest of four children, lived in England and Germany as a young child while his father studied for a doctorate at Oxford following graduate work at Harvard Divinity School. When his father joined the History of Religion faculty at Yale University in 1923, the family returned to the United States. By then, at the tender age of 4, Goodenough was already fluent in German and English. Language skills became a hallmark of many of his anthropological contributions, as will be discussed below.

Following study at Groton School in Massachusetts, Goodenough became a member of Telluride Scholarship House at Cornell University, where he majored in Scandinavian languages and literature and received a B.A. in 1940. It was at Cornell that Goodenough met his future wife, Ruth Gallagher, and it was she who encouraged him to enroll in a class with Leonard Cottrell, a dynamic young social psychologist from the University of Chicago who had just joined the Cornell faculty. Cottrell's influence, coupled with a course taken from Lauriston Sharp, Cornell's lone anthropologist at that time who had only recently returned from doctoral fieldwork with the Yir-Yoront in Australia, led Goodenough to pursue a career in anthropology. In 1940, he began graduate study at Yale and served as a research assistant in George Peter Murdock's Cross-Cultural Survey, an assignment that developed into a lifelong commitment to comparative studies. For many years, Goodenough was involved in the management of the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) that grew out of the Cross-Cultural Survey, and he served on the HRAF Executive Board from 1986–98. During his first year in graduate school, Goodenough participated in a seminar taught by Bronislaw Malinowski that explored how behavioristic psychology and psychoanalytic theory might be applied to anthropology. This course reinforced and added to the interests in psychology that Goodenough had developed in Cottrell's class the previous year.

Ward Goodenough married Ruth Gallagher in February 1941, and 9 months later, he was drafted into the U.S. Army as part of the call-up

for World War II. He spent less than a year in the infantry before he was assigned to the Pentagon as an enlisted man; there, he worked under Samuel Stouffer in the Research Unit of the Information and Education Division of the War Department (now the Defense Department). Goodenough was on active duty from November 1941 until December 1945 and achieved the non-commissioned officer rank of Technical Sergeant before his discharge.

Once the war was over, Ward, Ruth, and their family—which by then included two young daughters—returned to New Haven, where he resumed his graduate work in anthropology. In that period, he studied with Ralph Linton, who, like Malinowski, was a senior scholar with field research experience in Oceania; but even so, Murdock remained the single strongest influence on Goodenough's academic development. Still, the enduring impact of Linton's and Malinowski's teaching and ideas on Goodenough's approach to anthropology is indicated by his dedication of his book *Cooperation in Change* to these two men.

In 1947, Goodenough accompanied Murdock and several other scholars for 7 months of fieldwork focused on the small island of Romónum in Chuuk Lagoon under auspices of the Coordinated Investigation of Micronesian Anthropology (CIMA).<sup>1</sup> Goodenough's language facility stood him in good stead as there were very few English speakers in Chuuk at that time. Aided by Dyen's concurrent linguistic research, Goodenough achieved a remarkable level of fluency in Chuukese. The CIMA fieldwork on Romónum provided the basis for his doctoral dissertation, which was completed in 1949 and later revised and published as *Property, Kin, and Community on Truk* (1951). More than a half century later, this book remains an enduring classic of Pacific ethnography, and it also contributed importantly to the theoretical development of culture as an ideational or conceptual system rather than just recurrent patterns of behavior.

Chuuk remained the central ethnographic focus of Goodenough's research and writing throughout his career, even as he also carried out anthropological studies in Kiribati (1951), New Britain (1954),<sup>2</sup> and the United States. He returned to Romónum for additional fieldwork in 1964–5 and made several later brief visits there, during which he gathered still more data. Notably, he helped organize and run a

---

1 Chuuk (rhymes with Luke) is the correct name for the islands formerly called Truk. The group from Yale University that went to Romónum included Isidore Dyen (a linguist), Thomas Gladwin and Frank LeBar (cultural anthropology graduate students), and Clarence Wong (a botanist). Dyen, Gladwin, and LeBar all subsequently published important books about Chuuk based on the CIMA project, and Gladwin and LeBar each wrote a dissertation from their research there.

2 Goodenough led a multiperson research team that included Ann Chowning, Charles and Edith Valentine, and Daris Swindler to the Lakalai area of New Britain.

conference in Chuuk in 1972 to develop an official orthography for the Chuukese language. From that collaboration with knowledgeable Chuukese and Hiroshi Sugita, a professional linguist, Goodenough and Sugita published two significant volumes: *Trukese-English Dictionary* (1980) and *Trukese-English Dictionary, Supplementary Volume: English-Trukese and Index of Trukese Word Roots* (1990). These important books reflect Goodenough's language skills and his enduring interest in the practical value and application of anthropological learning.

Goodenough's vision of culture as a conceptual system was articulated most clearly in three seminal essays published a few years after the appearance of *Property, Kin, and Community on Truk*.<sup>3</sup> The following passage captures the essence of this view of culture, and it is one of the more influential and oft-quoted statements in modern anthropology:

As I see it, a society's culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and to do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves. Culture, being what people have to learn as distinct from their biological heritage, must consist of the end product of learning: knowledge, in a most general, if relative, sense of the term. By this definition, we should note that culture is not a material phenomenon; it does not consist of things, people, behavior, or emotions. It is rather an organization of these things. It is the forms of things that people have in mind, their models for perceiving, relating and otherwise interpreting them. (Goodenough, 1957, p. 167)

This approach of Goodenough's came to be known as *cognitive anthropology*, of which he is seen to have been a key founder. He argued that the methods of descriptive linguistics could fruitfully be adapted to descriptions of other cultural systems besides language (e.g., kinship terminologies). This analysis of other cultural systems led to what was called *componential analysis*, an innovation that subsequently was used by numerous scholars to explore not only kinship systems but also many other systems of classification. Additionally, as a part of cognitive anthropology, Goodenough pioneered work in decision-making models, most notably in his article "Residence Rules" (1956), and he continued to develop the area of cognitive anthropology in *Description and Comparison in Cultural Anthropology* (1970) and *Culture, Language, and Society* (1981). His broad interest in psychological approaches hearkens

3 "Componential Analysis and the Study of Meaning," *Language* 32, no. 1 (1956): 195–216; "Residence Rules," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 12, no 1. (1956): 22–37; "Cultural Anthropology and Linguistics," in *Report of the Seventh Annual Roundtable Meeting on Linguistics and Language Study*, edited by Paul L. Garvin, Washington, DC: Georgetown University, 1957. *Monograph Series on Language and Linguistics* 9: 167–73.

back to the influence of Cottrell, Malinowski, and Linton, and it continued throughout Goodenough's career. His ideas have been credited as being "crucial for the emergence of the ethnopsychological perspective within anthropology" (Black, 1999, p. 244).

That said, Goodenough's contributions are by no means limited to cognitive and psychological anthropology. His anthropological interests ranged widely, and his insights enriched numerous areas of anthropological inquiry. He was a consummate and exacting ethnographer even as he was a major player in the development of anthropological theory. For example, he published on (a) the Micronesian star compass that was used in traditional open ocean navigation (1953); (b) Micronesian cosmology (1986); (c) Chuuk's place names ("Notes on Truk's Place Names," 1966); (d) a Chuukese monster named "pupily-eyeballs-thing" ("The Tale of Pupily-Eyeballs-Thing," 1966); and (e) kinship and land tenure in Oceania (e.g., "Changing Social Organization," 1974). Particularly notable in this last regard was his widely cited article "A Problem in Malayo-Polynesian Social Organization" (1955), in which he argued that to understand relationships in Pacific Island societies, anthropologists must give attention to land as well as kinship, presaging later developments in Pacific studies.

Goodenough's most widely read book is *Cooperation in Change: An Anthropological Approach to Community Development* (1963). The volume serves as a manual for those engaged in development projects in communities around the world and continues to be of influence a half century after it was written. Goodenough's long-standing interest in the practical uses of anthropology and culture change led to his election as president of the Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA) in 1963, and in 1997, the SfAA honored him with the Bronislaw Malinowski Award. This award is presented annually in recognition of efforts to understand and serve the needs of the world through social science. In his acceptance speech, Goodenough discussed a project in which he had been involved in designing a marking system that would protect buried nuclear waste materials from disturbance for 10,000 years. He and the other social scientists on that interdisciplinary team needed to predict the kind of society that may emerge over that time period and determine the symbols and languages that might best provide a warning to keep curious persons from harm's way.

Perhaps as a result of his father's scholarly engagement with religion, Goodenough found the topic one of continuing fascination throughout his career. He published several important articles on religion, and he served as president of the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science during 1987. Fittingly, his final book—*Under Heaven's Brow: Pre-Christian Religious Tradition in Chuuk* (2002)—was a *magnum*

*opus* based partially on esoteric data he acquired during his initial field-work in Chuuk in the late 1940s.

Goodenough received numerous honors over the course of his illustrious career. He was a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford in 1958, presented the Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures in 1968 (subsequently published as *Description and Comparison in Cultural Anthropology*), and was elected to the National Academy of Sciences in 1971. Soon thereafter, he was also elected to the American Philosophical Society (1973) and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (1975). He was a Guggenheim Fellow in 1979–80, became an Honorary Fellow of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania (ASAO) in 1985, received the Distinguished Service Award in 1986 from the American Anthropological Association, and taught as a Fulbright Lecturer in Ireland during 1987. Goodenough edited the *American Anthropologist* from 1966–70 and was a member of the editorial board of *Science* from 1976–9. In 1983–4, he presented lectures on various campuses around the United States as a Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar. On the occasion of his 70th birthday, he was presented with a *Festschrift* volume (Marshall and Caughey, 1989), and in 2012, he was named the Groton School Distinguished Grotonian for that year.

Although he taught for a year at the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 1948–9, Goodenough was hired by the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) in the fall of 1949, where he remained for the rest of his career. He had a large influence on Pacific anthropology beyond his own writings. He chaired many doctoral dissertations at Penn, 15 of which were completed by students who conducted their research in Oceania. Both of his first two Ph.D. students—Ann Chowning and Jane Goodale—were elected as Honorary Fellows of the ASAO, and between them, they chaired another 11 Oceania doctorates who might be thought of as Goodenough’s “grandstudents.”

Goodenough wrote poetry (especially sonnets) and composed keyboard music (notably fugues and other contrapuntal forms), and some of his poems were written in both Chuukese and English. The second half of one titled “*Waasééna* ‘Drift Voyager’” (1988) provides an appropriate way to remember Ward Goodenough now that he is no longer with us:

I am a drift voyager.  
My body will remain  
in wedlock with the earth,  
but my soul will return  
going back to its home—  
soar off among the stars,

rest at Repose Rock;  
 fly away to Under Brow,  
 bathing in its lagoon;  
 zoom to its zenith point,  
 peak of empowering;  
 alight on its far side  
 at the source of all.  
 A drift voyager I.

Goodenough is survived by four children, 10 grandchildren, four great grandchildren, and by Joan May, who became his beloved partner following Ruth's death in 2001.

Elected 1973

MAC MARSHALL

Emeritus Professor of Anthropology and Community and Behavioral Health  
 University of Iowa

#### REFERENCES

- Black, Peter W. "Psychological Anthropology and its Discontents: Science and Rhetoric in Post-war Micronesia." In *American Anthropology in Micronesia: An Assessment*, edited by Robert C. Kiste and Mac Marshall, 225–53. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999.
- Goodenough, Ward H. *Property, Kin, and Community on Truk*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951.
- . *Native Astronomy in the Central Carolines*. University of Pennsylvania Museum Monographs. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1953.
- . "A Problem in Malayo-Polynesian Social Organization." *American Anthropologist* 57, no. 1 (1955): 71–83.
- . "Componential Analysis and the Study of Meaning," *Language* 32, no. 1 (1956): 195–216.
- . "Residence Rules." *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 12, no. 1. (1956): 22–37.
- . "Cultural Anthropology and Linguistics." In *Report of the Seventh Annual Roundtable Meeting on Linguistics and Language Study*, edited by Paul L. Garvin, Washington, DC: Georgetown University, 1957. *Monograph Series on Language and Linguistics* 9: 167–73.
- . *Cooperation in Change: An Anthropological Approach to Community Development*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1963.
- . "Notes on Truk's Place Names." *Micronesica* 2, no. 2 (1966): 95–129.
- . "The Tale of Pupily-Eyeballs-Thing, a Truk Ghost Story, as Told by Boutau K. Efort." *Expedition* 8, no. 2 (1966): 23–9.
- . *Description and Comparison in Cultural Anthropology*. Chicago: Aldine, 1970.
- . "Changing Social Organization on Romónum, Truk, 1947–1965." In *Social Organization and the Applications of Anthropology: Essays in Honor of Lauriston Sharp*, edited by Robert J. Smith, 62–93. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974.



- . "Toward an Anthropologically Useful Definition of Religion." In *Changing Perspectives in the Scientific Study of Religion*, edited by Alan W. Eister, 165–84. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1974.
- . *Culture, Language, and Society* (2nd ed). Menlo Park, C.A.: Benjamin Cummings Publishing Co., Inc., 1981. First published in 1971.
- . "Sky World and This World: The Place of *Kachaw* in Micronesian Cosmology." *American Anthropologist* 88, no. 3 (1986): 551–68.
- . "Self Maintenance as a Religious Concern." *Zygon. Journal of Religion and Science* 23, no. 2 (1988): 117–28.
- . "Waasééna 'Drift Voyager'." *Anthropology and Humanism Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (1988): 26–7.
- . *Under Heaven's Brow: Pre-Christian Religious Tradition in Chuuk*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2002.
- Goodenough, Ward H., and Hiroshi Sugita. *Trukese-English Dictionary*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1980.
- . *Trukese-English Dictionary, Supplementary Volume: English-Trukese and Index of Trukese Word Roots*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1990.
- Marshall, Mac, and John L. Caughey, eds. *Culture, Kin, and Cognition in Oceania: Essays in Honor of Ward H. Goodenough*. American Anthropological Association Special Publication No. 25. Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association, 1989.