

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

FREDERICK RUSSELL EGGAN

1906—1991

A Biographical Memoir by
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Biographical Memoir

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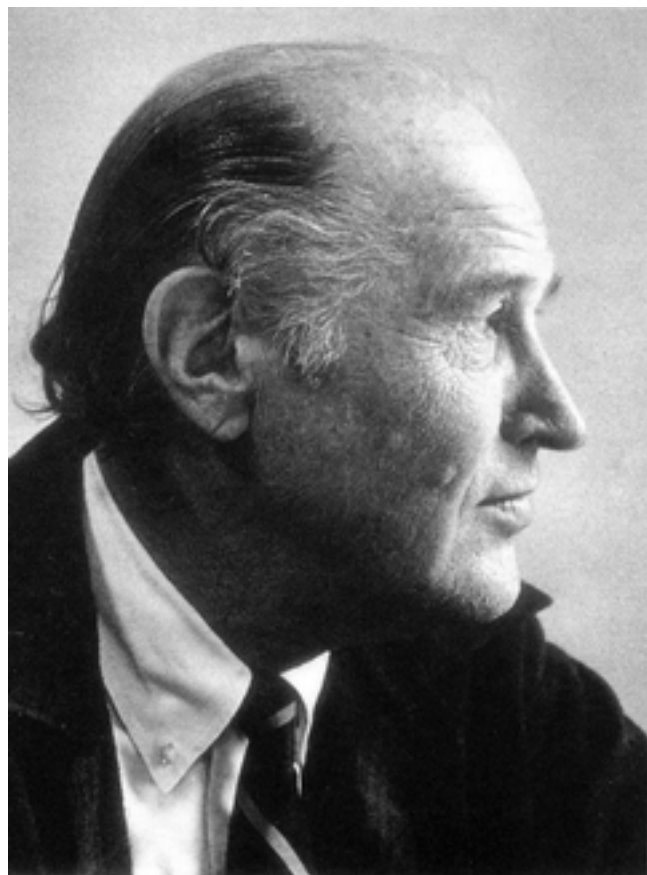


Photo by Joan Eggan

Fred Eggan

FREDERICK RUSSELL EGGAN

September 12, 1906–May 7, 1991

BY EVON Z. VOGT, JR.

FRED EGGAN, WHO DIED IN Santa Fe, New Mexico, on May 7, 1991, in his eighty-fourth year, was universally recognized as one of the great anthropologists of the twentieth century. His pivotal contribution to anthropological science during his long, productive life consisted of a creative synthesis of American historical ethnology with the structural-functional approach of British social anthropology, especially in a series of rigorous, comparative studies of the kinship and social systems of Native Americans in the Southwest and on the Plains. In addition, he made notable contributions to our knowledge of the cultures of tribal groups in the northern Philippines.¹

Fred Eggan was born in Seattle, Washington, on September 12, 1906, one of two children (the other a younger sister) of Alfred Julius Eggan and Olive M. Smith. His father was born into a large family in Rushford, Minnesota, a small working-class Norwegian-American community. He was a bright, restless boy who loved adventure and travel to faraway places. At the age of fifteen he enlisted in the U.S. Navy for a ten-year stint. After his discharge, Alfred tried a number of unsuccessful business ventures and eventually moved to Illinois, where he joined the U.S. Merchant Ma-

rine and became a petty officer serving in the engineering department of ships sailing through the Great Lakes.

Fred's mother, Olive M. Smith, of old Yankee stock, was born in Armenia, New York, where her father was a successful middle-class businessman. Olive was a well-disciplined schoolteacher who taught her cherished son to work hard and to love books.

By the time Fred was in the eighth grade, the family had moved three times—from Seattle, to Vancouver, to Rushford, to Lake Forest, a well-to-do suburb of Chicago, where they lived on the wrong side of the tracks. Fred's love of books was further enhanced when, at the age of twelve, he contracted a serious case of typhoid fever and was not permitted to attend school for a year. He promptly discovered the public library, where he happily spent most of the year.

Fred later graduated from the Deerfield Township High School, excelling in mathematics, physics, and chemistry. He enrolled in the University of Chicago in 1923, and in 1924 his parents moved again to an apartment near the university, which they occupied during Fred's undergraduate and graduate years. The family was forced to make many sacrifices to send their two children to college. Both children lived at home until they completed their graduate work, and their mother took in boarders to supplement their income.

After first contemplating a degree in business administration (in which he attended classes with James B. Griffin), young Eggan shifted to psychology as a major. But during his college days he was also exposed to geography courses, which intensified his interest in faraway places and peoples, and he stumbled by chance into an anthropology course on "Peoples and Races" taught by the newly appointed head of the department, Fay-Cooper Cole, who had been trained by Franz Boas at Columbia. As Eggan remembered in retro-

spect, "Cole was a dynamic and inspiring lecturer whose enthusiasm for the subject was contagious" and this course launched him on lifelong involvement with anthropology (Eggan, 1974, p. 5).

While still an undergraduate, Eggan and his classmate, Cornelius Osgood, were invited by Fay-Cooper Cole to join a graduate seminar on India taught jointly by Cole and Edward Sapir, who had been brought to the university in 1925. The two undergraduates were excited by being allowed to attend the seminar, until the topics were assigned. Eggan reported:

We protested we were neophytes, with only two or three weeks of introductory anthropology, but the faculty decreed it to be a "working seminar." I was given the topic, "The Caste System of India," and disappeared into the stacks for a month where I read all the reports on caste in the census volumes and other tomes. I survived the experience and produced a paper, but I have been happy to leave the caste system to others ever since. (Eggan, 1974, p. 6)

Even though Eggan did a year of graduate work in psychology and wrote a master's thesis in 1928, titled "An Experimental Study of Attitudes Toward Race and Nationality," under the supervision of the eminent psychometrician, L. L. Thorndike, he had already decided he wanted to be an anthropologist. Unfortunately, there was little support for graduate work, especially for a student changing fields, so he took a teaching post for two years at Wentworth Junior College and Military Academy in Lexington, Missouri, where he was assigned courses in psychology, sociology, and history and saved enough money to return to graduate work in anthropology in the summer of 1930.

By this time Fay-Cooper Cole had added Robert Redfield, who had just returned from his field study of Tepoztlan, Mexico, to the staff as an instructor and had moved to establish a separate department of anthropology. While Cole

taught physical anthropology and archeology, Sapir covered linguistics and ethnology, with excursions into culture and personality, and Redfield offered courses in folk culture and peasant society. Cole also organized field expeditions to survey and dig archeological sites in Illinois, and Fred Eggan spent several summers excavating Indian mounds and village sites in the Middle West. He later participated in the archeological Awatovi Expedition of Professor J. O. Brew in Hopi country in the summers of 1939 and 1940. These early interests in archeology are reflected in his article, "The Ethnological Cultures and Their Archaeological Backgrounds" (1952), as well as in much of his other work on North American cultures. During this same period, Eggan also took courses at Chicago with visiting professor Leslie Spier, who first sparked his interest in kinship and Southwestern ethnology.

In 1931 there occurred an even more momentous happening in the career of Fred Eggan. Fay-Cooper Cole recruited A. R. Radcliffe-Brown to replace Edward Sapir, who left Chicago to become Sterling Professor of Anthropology and Linguistics at Yale. Eggan attended Radcliffe-Brown's course on family, kin, and clan and was stimulated by the erudition and fresh theoretical orientation he brought to the department. Radcliffe-Brown vigorously attacked the ethnological work done by American anthropologists and advocated the synchronic study of social structures as functioning wholes. He also contended that a comparison of these structures could provide a set of principles of organization comparable to the principles discovered by biologists for the organization and functioning of organisms. R-B (as he was called by his colleagues) arrived at Chicago with a program for reanalyzing the social structures of the American Indian in the manner he had developed in his research with the Australian aboriginals. Eggan became R-

B's research assistant, with the task of reviewing publications on the American Indian and writing summaries of what was known and what needed to be done (Fogelson, 1979, pp. 163-64).

In the summer of 1932 Eggan was selected for a Laboratory of Anthropology (Santa Fe) fellowship for field training in ethnology, and he joined Edward Kennard (Columbia), Mischa Titiev (Harvard), Jess Spierer (Yale), and Georges Devereaux (France) in a field party that spent the summer among the Hopi under the direction of Leslie White. The experience was formative for Eggan, who subsequently had a lifelong association with the Hopi, during which he revolutionized our understanding of their social organization. Fred was now fully committed to social anthropology and clearly perceived the need for new theory to illuminate Boasian empiricism (Fenton, 1992, p. 434).

The Hopi research led to a Ph.D. dissertation on the social organization of the Western Pueblos (Hopi, Zuni, Acoma, and Laguna), which Eggan completed in 1933, later revising and publishing it (Eggan, 1950). In this landmark study, Eggan made brilliant analyses of each of the Western Pueblo social structures as functioning wholes, then compared the four, and contrasted the Western Pueblos with the Eastern Pueblos (who live along the Rio Grande). He focused especially on the contrast between the "lineage principle" he found in the kinship systems of the Zuni and Hopi with their crucial matrilineal clans and the "principle of dual organization" of the Eastern Pueblos with their "Summer People" and "Winter People," each with their own ceremonial kivas. He demonstrated how the variations currently observed in the Pueblo social structures are related to cultural adaptations to ecological niches (dry-land agriculture in the west versus irrigation agriculture in the east) and in historical experiences—heavy Spanish contact along the Rio

Grande compared to slight Spanish influence in the far western Pueblos of Zuni and Hopi.

In the summer of 1933 Eggan undertook a brief field trip among the Mississippi Choctaw and the Cheyenne and Arapaho in Oklahoma (Eggan, 1937). Armed with these data and supplemented with detailed library study, he discovered that these kinship systems were not immutable but subject to changes due to shifts in ecological settings and historical experiences. He also found that their joking relationship functioned systematically to regulate respect and avoidance relationships among kin. Eggan likewise demonstrated how a tribe like the Cheyenne could change from a lineage-type kinship system nicely adapted to a settled agricultural existence in southwestern Minnesota during the early historic period to a generation-type system when they were pushed onto the Plains by other tribes, became nomadic buffalo hunters with horses and rifles, and needed bands of "brothers" for efficient hunting and fighting on the High Plains (Eggan, 1937).

From this research emerged his classic presidential address to the American Anthropological Association on "Social Anthropology and the Method of Controlled Comparison" (1954), in which he cogently laid out the theoretical and methodological dimensions of a comparative method that has been widely admired and utilized by anthropologists during the past four decades. By "controlled comparison" Eggan meant essentially that the cases for comparative treatment are best selected when they are either (1) a small number of cases that are cultural variations set within a geographical and historical frame (such as the Southwestern Pueblos or the tribes of the American Plains) or (2) are variations on a given type of social structure (such as moiety systems).

Eggan continued to work with this method of controlled

comparison during most of his professional career; two of his last publications were a brilliant review titled "Shoshone Kinship Structures and Their Significance for Anthropological Theory" (1980) and a masterful article on the Southwest entitled "Comparative Social Organization" (1983).

The other area of the world in which Fred Eggan engaged in basic field research and scientific publication was the northern Philippines. Although his anthropological data on the Philippines were never so fully analyzed and published as they were on the American Indian cultures of the Southwest and the Plains—mainly because of the interruptions of World War II, the restrictions imposed by the Marcos regime on anthropological research, and the subsequent administrative duties he undertook—Fred collected significant information and published a number of fundamental papers on the tribal cultures of northern Luzon as he further developed his structural-historical concepts (Sahlins, 1992, p. 24).

In 1934 Eggan had hoped to undertake two years of field research in the Kimberly district of Australia on an Australian National Research Council postdoctoral fellowship arranged by Radcliffe-Brown. He had just spent the winter season of 1933-34 doing field research among the Hopi. But when he returned to Chicago in March, President Roosevelt had just devalued the dollar. Since the Australian National Research Council received a large portion of its funds from the Rockefeller Foundation, it was forced to cancel Eggan's fellowship. At this point, Fay-Cooper Cole came to the rescue with a proposal that Eggan go to the Philippines. Cole had always wanted to send a young anthropologist there to study what had happened to the Tinguian, whom he and his wife had studied in 1907 and 1908. He drafted a proposal and found the funds for Eggan. But Fred was disappointed. In his words: "It was attractive

but I would have preferred going to Australia. I had always been studying other people's tribes, and it would have been fun to have a tribe of my own" (Eggan, 1974, p. 12).

Nonetheless, Eggan dutifully went to the Philippines, with a stop in Japan for a month, where he traveled around staying in rural inns and climbing Mt. Fuji with two companions he met on the ship crossing the Pacific. He arrived in Manila in the fall of 1934 and checked in with H. Otley Beyer, the one remaining anthropologist in the Philippines, who took Eggan in charge and outfitted him "in white cotton duck for Manila and brown cotton for the field."

Eggan spent the 1934-35 year in the Abra Province of Luzon, learning some of the language, collecting data on all aspects of Tinguian life, and focusing his research interests on problems of social and cultural change. His principal mentor and informant was "Dumagat, the son of a headman whom Cole had brought to Chicago to help him with setting up exhibits in the Field Museum, and who had then stayed on in America until the onset of the Depression" (Eggan, 1974, p. 15). He later worked farther up the Abra River and traveled to almost all the communities in Abra, including one journey over the Cordillera with a group of Tinguians.

The results of this field research appeared in a number of papers, the most important being "Some Aspects of Culture Change in the Northern Philippines" (1941), in which Eggan reported on the regular series of changes in social, political, economic, and religious institutions he discovered as he traveled from the interior to the coast—from the Ifugao through the Bontok, Tinguian, and Ilocano. To define these changes, he introduced the notion of cultural drift, adapted from Sapir's concept of linguistic drift.

Just as Fred Eggan was getting ready to return to the United States, he received word that he was being offered a

position as instructor at the University of Chicago, with his time being divided between the Extension Program and the Department of Anthropology. After serving for five years as instructor, he served as assistant professor (1940-42), associate professor (1942-48), and professor (1948-63). He then became the Harold H. Swift Distinguished Service Professor of Anthropology until he retired in 1974. During this period he served as department chairman twice (1948-52 and 1961-63), in an era when the Department of Anthropology at Chicago was considered first in the nation.

In 1938 Fred Eggan married Dorothy Way, who visited the Hopi Reservation with him frequently and worked with him in doing field research. She became noted for her research on Hopi dreams.²

During World War II, Fred Eggan was called to duty as chief of research, Office of Special Services, Philippine Commonwealth Government. Later he became a captain in the army after graduating from the School for Military Government in Charlottesville and was assigned to duty in Chicago as the director of the Civil Affairs Training School for the Far East (1943-45). In 1945 he also served as a Cultural Relations Officer for the Department of State. Following the war, Eggan became the director of the Philippine Study Program at the University of Chicago, a post he held until his retirement.

Eggan finally managed to return to additional field research in the Philippines when he was appointed as a Fulbright Research Scholar at the University of the Philippines during 1949-50, where he helped train young Philippine anthropologists. His fieldwork during that Fulbright year was focused on Sagada, an Igorot community west of Bontoc. From this research flowed a number of papers on the Philippines, the most notable being his article titled "Cultural Drift and Social Change" (1963), which appeared

in the Festschrift for Melville J. Herskovits. Eggan also served as the supervisor of the four-volume *Area Handbook on the Philippines* (1956) published by the Human Relations Area Files, Inc.

In the 1960s Fred Eggan became one of our most esteemed senior anthropologists. His contributions were recognized by his election to the American Philosophical Society in 1962 and to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the National Academy of Sciences in 1963, as well as by being invited to deliver the Lewis Henry Morgan Lecture at the University of Rochester in 1964.

The Morgan Lecture gave Eggan an opportunity to make a modern appraisal of the scientific achievements of Lewis Henry Morgan, to summarize and synthesize his own scholarly efforts to understand changes in kinship systems, and to establish a link with that first American scholar to undertake a systematic study of kinship.³ The lectures were published as *The American Indian* (1966) and they constitute, in the wise words of one of Eggan's students: "the most thorough and readable synthesis of American Indian kinship and social organization in the literature and serve as a model comparative study" (DeMallie, 1991, p. 175).

The 1960s were also a time of personal turmoil for Fred Eggan with the long illness of his first wife, Dorothy, who died in 1965 and to whose memory he dedicated the publication of the Morgan Lecture (Eggan, 1966).

In 1969 Fred married his second wife, Joan Rosenfels, a photographer and psychotherapist, who is well known in anthropological circles for her remarkable photographs of anthropologists, some of which are in the Royal Anthropological Institute in London. Fred and Joan led busy and happy lives together in Chicago, where Joan practiced psychotherapy for over twenty-five years as a therapist with the students of the Laboratory Schools of the University of Chi-

cago and as a psychological consultant to school administrators and pediatricians. In Santa Fe, where they moved upon Fred's retirement, Joan served as a psychological consultant to two private schools; her present private practice is mainly limited to adults in the arts. She is likewise currently undertaking a study of Jungian dream analysis with the hope of analyzing the dreams of Don Talayesva (whose biography was published in the book *Sun Chief*) that were collected over the years by Dorothy Eggan.

In 1970 Eggan was a visiting fellow at All Souls College at Oxford. He delivered the Sir James Frazer Lecture at Cambridge University in 1971 and became a corresponding fellow of the British Academy in 1974. He also served on many boards, councils, and committees, becoming president of the American Anthropological Society in 1953 and a member of the Council of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (1982-85) and of the Council of the American Philosophical Society (1983-86).

In his retirement in Santa Fe, Fred Eggan continued his work on the Indians of the Southwest and became a crucial researcher, consultant, and champion for the Hopis and Zunis in their land claims against the U.S. government. The deep respect these Pueblos had for Fred Eggan and his work is expressed in the following message (in part) to his widow from Vernon Masayesva, chairman, and Abbott Sekaquaptewa, past chairman, of the Hopi Tribal Council at the time of his death:

We will miss Dr. Eggan greatly, but we realize that his contribution to understanding and documenting Hopi culture, and his involvement with our eternal struggle to recover our ancestral lands will be his everlasting legacy to the Hopi Tribe. May the Great Spirit be with you and your family and with Fred as he continues his journey to join his ancestors. (personal communication from Joan Eggan, November 2, 1991).

Fred Eggan had a great capacity for friendship and became a mentor for dozens of students and younger colleagues in anthropology (including this author)—as an “older brother” when he was younger, and as an “uncle” when he became older. He also made countless indirect contributions to science in his service on boards, panels, and committees that perform the annual decisions and tasks that must be done for our enterprise to carry on and move forward. He has indeed been described as “the model anthropologist of his generation” (Fenton, 1992, p. 435).

But Fred Eggan’s greatest impact in the long run will come from his publications, which exhibit, in the thoughtful words of one of his younger colleagues at the University of Chicago: “His clarity of vision, ability to reduce complex phenomena to their essentials with minimum distortion, and capacity to demonstrate productive connections between hitherto disparate approaches and theories...” (Fogelson, 1979, p. 165).

Fred Eggan and his scholarly contributions will be long and warmly remembered by his colleagues in anthropology and other sciences throughout the world, as well as by his countless friends among the peoples he studied in North America and in the Philippines.

NOTES

1. The author has drawn on the biographical files of the National Academy of Sciences and the reminiscences and comments of Joan Rosenfels Eggan and James B. Griffin, as well as on various autobiographies, biographies, and obituaries of Fred Eggan, including Raymond J. De Mallie, “Eggan, Fred” in *International Directory of Anthropologists*, ed. C. Winter, pp. 174-75, New York: Garland, 1991; Fred Eggan, “Among the Anthropologists,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 3(1974):1-19; William N. Fenton, “Fred Russell Eggan,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 136(1992):433-34; Raymond D. Fogelson, “Eggan, Fred,” *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences: Bio-*

graphical Supplement 18(1979):163-66; Marshall Sahlins, "Fred Eggan: History and Structure," *Anthropology Today* 8(Feb. 1992):23-25; Ernest L. Schusky, "Fred Eggan: Anthropologist Full Circle," *American Ethnologist* 16(1989):142-57; Aram A. Yengoyan, "Fred Eggan (1906-1991)," *Journal of Asian Studies* 50(1991):1017-19; and Mario D. Zamora, "Fred Russell Eggan 1906-1991," *Eastern Anthropologist* 44(1991):313-14.

2. See Dorothy Eggan, "The Significance of Dreams for Anthropological Research," *American Anthropologist* 51(1949):177-98; "The Manifest Content of Dreams: A Challenge to Social Science," *American Anthropologist* 54(1952):469-85; and "The Personal Use of Myth in Dreams," *Journal of American Folklore* 68(1955):445-53.

3. See Lewis Henry Morgan, *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family*, Smithsonian Contributions of Knowledge, vol. 17. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution.

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