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# Introduction

## The Continuing Legacy of Melvin Ember (1933-2009) Part II

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### Abstract

This article provides an introduction to the four articles that comprise this special issue of *Cross-Cultural Research*.

### Keywords

cross-cultural research, research methods, history of anthropology, HRAF, Melvin Ember

This and the previous issue of *Cross-Cultural Research* are dedicated to Melvin Ember, editor of this journal from 1982 until his death on September 27, 2009. These two special issues are intended to provide both an overview of Mel's contributions to comparative research and an exploration of the impact his work and ideas will continue to have in years to come. The articles in the previous issue of *Cross-Cultural Research* focused on Mel's career and focal areas of scholarship. The introduction to the previous issue also gave an overview of Mel's career and a bibliography of his major publications.<sup>1</sup> The articles in this issue take specific aspects of Mel's work as a starting point for developing new ideas, providing a glimpse of Mel's continuing legacy.

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The Continuing Legacy of Melvin Ember (1993-2009) Part II

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Richard Blanton employs a worldwide sample of premodern states to explore variation in collective action. His purpose is to understand why some polities provide opportunities for collective action while others do not. In framing his question and developing his data set, Blanton employs methods that were used extensively by Melvin Ember and were often improved by him. It is interesting to note that that Blanton attended an NSF-sponsored Summer Institute in Comparative Research that was modeled after the Summer Institute in Cross-Cultural Research that Mel directed in 1964. Blanton's research gives us a glimpse of an important aspect of Mel's legacy—that of the methods of comparative research he long promoted and actively taught to generations of scholars.

William Jankowiak was a participant in the 1991 Summer Institute in Comparative Research, and his article with Amber Joiner and Cynthia Klabia provides a wonderful example of how methods taught at the Summer Institutes have been employed to in ethnographic research, in this case focused on child aggression in China. The article by Victor de Munck and his colleagues comparing models of romantic love in the United States, Lithuania, and Russia also employs ethnographic methods advocated and taught by Mel. The two articles differ markedly—Jankowiak and colleagues employ naturalistic observation, while de Munck and colleagues use questionnaires and interviews. However, both reflect the core purpose of the methods that Mel promoted—to acquire empirical data on variation in behavior that could be analyzed to explore both the range of variation in a given behavior and possible related or causal variables. Collecting such data requires careful planning before going into the field and the ability to maintain rigorous protocol during fieldwork itself. The authors of these two articles accomplished both tasks and show what the future might hold if ethnographers employ the types of field methods championed by Mel.

Throughout his career, though particularly during his long tenure as HRAF president, Mel sought to expand the use of HRAF and to encourage nonanthropologists to employ it. The article by Douglas Raybeck and Paul Ngo illustrates an innovative way to use the Human Relations Area Files, in this case to test a model of human behavior on the basis of work by psychologists and neuroscientists. The article demonstrates that, just as Mel had long argued, HRAF is a resource with wide applicability and utility.

Mel had a long interest in warfare and other forms of conflict. Claudio Cioffi's article reflects work Mel was engaged in at the time of his death. Mel hoped to employ agent-based modeling as a tool to better understand both the causes of conflict and its potential impact on societies and had just started work with Cioffi and his team of modelers on the project described in the

article. Cioffi illustrates both Mel's career-long interest in developing new methods for comparative research and his long interest in conflict as a social mover. The article also demonstrates Mel's rare facility in working with scholars outside of anthropology.

There is one article missing from these two special issues of *Cross-Cultural Research*—the one that Mel himself was going to write. The articles in these special issues come from two symposia, one held at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in 2009 and the other at the annual meeting of the Society for Anthropological Sciences in 2010. Mel was to be a discussant at both, but died just 2 months before the first was scheduled to be held. The symposia went forward, and the articles here and in the previous issue of this journal provide a glimpse of how informative and stimulating they were.<sup>2</sup> Mel would have loved them.

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interests with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article. **[AQ: 1]**

### Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article. **[AQ: 2]**

### Notes

1. A complete bibliography of Melvin Ember's publications can be found at [http://www.yale.edu/hraf/mel\\_personal.htm](http://www.yale.edu/hraf/mel_personal.htm).
2. Several papers from the symposia could not be published here or in the previous issue of *Cross-Cultural Research*. I want to thank William Divale, Lew Hendrix, and Alice Schlegel for their participation, and I am sorry we were not able to publish their fascinating papers at this point. I am hopeful they will appear in the pages of this journal in the near future.

### Bio

**Peter N. Peregrine** is professor of anthropology at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin. His research focuses on the origins of complex society and the application of cross-cultural methods to archaeology. He is currently the president of the Society for Anthropological Sciences and is a strong supporter of scientific approaches in anthropology.