Prefatory notes:
1. 50yrs ago—spring’56—CSAS met here in Bloomington, and I gave my first CSAS paper. It later turned out, that I was one of only 3 women on the program. There was Erminie Voeglin and another woman? The curious thing about that was that I didn’t notice it! I only found out when pointed it out to me in the 70’s (?) when he wrote his history of CSAS. There were of course other women present, including the undergraduate who had come with our group. But there were only 3 presenters.

2. I am struck by my overlap, one way or another, with other members of the panel: John and I were both students at NU, and came through some of the same experiences as a result, although we were never in residence at the same time, and the dept changed over time. And of course we have been colleagues at OSU for the past 29 yrs. Cora and I were both undergraduates at Queens, taught and mentored by H. Powdermaker, though of course we represent different periods in that institution. There is also an overlap I share with Ray Fogelson, since we were both students of A.I. Hallowell, though I at NU and he several years later at Penn. Others on the panel, I am sure, share overlaps with others and in other ways. This connectedness among anthropologists, in spite of the expansion of the discipline over the years does seem to me striking, even thought we are no longer the small family of 50yrs ago.

Anthropology as a rite of passage? As a way of life? —A coping strategy?>

When I was 12, or perhaps 13, someone gave me a book about anthropology as a birthday present. As I recall it, the cover pictured a proverbial tropical Englishman: in shorts and a cork helmet. And it had Voelkerkunde in the title. That is because the book was in German—because we were living in Vienna. The book, apparently, was part of a series on the professions for children, to acquaint them, I presume, with life opportunities. The giver of the gift was probably one of my mother’s friends. I can’t imagine what this woman was thinking. Surely not that I might become an anthropologist! There were numerous professional women in our circle; they were physicians, dentists, pharmacists, teachers, but I wonder whether anyone had ever heard of an anthropologist. It would have been as unlikely as a career choice for a Central European teenage girl as one could have dreamed up. And that is true retrospectively also, on the basis of what I’ve since learned.
about Anthropology in Austria in the 1930s. So coming to America and attending college here was surely a pre-condition for my becoming an anthropologist. And here there immediately was a woman among my teachers: Hortense Powdemaker (Bourguignon 1991) who was then teaching at Queens College of the City of NY. At first I wanted to major in Linguistics—mostly because I was still learning English, after having spent a year in a Swiss boarding school, learning French. I really didn’t know what the discipline of Linguistics was, but since there was no Linguistics major at Queens College in the early ’40s, Anthropology seemed to be a good first step. The Introductory course, after all, covered Race Language and Culture, and we used Boas’ 1938 textbook with that title. And I somehow knew even as early as my sophomore year, when I was required to declare a major, that I would go on to graduate school. And that did happen, only not quite as I had imagined it.

In the fall of ’41, before the US got into the War, a friend who was taking the Race Language and Culture course, told me of a public meeting about the war, at which Franz Boas would speak. Since the meeting was going to be mostly in German, my parents went too. Boas was a very slight little old man, he spoke in German, but I don’t remember what he said—I think he was reading his text. It must have been one of his last public appearances, since he died shortly afterwards—at Columbia, at lunch, with Levi-Strauss and Rivet.

What anthropology taught me were the linked concepts of culture and cultural relativity. Though at first I could probably not have articulated it, it made a good deal of sense to me that the differences between my life in NY and in Europe had something to do with cultural patterns. Reading about Melanesians in my first anthro class didn’t do much for
me (Seligman’s Southern Massim is a pretty dull book), but Benedict’s Patterns of Culture was something else. In Powdermaker’s Culture and Personality we read timely books, though they were perhaps not strictly, narrowly, anthropological: Fromm’s Escape from Freedom and Horney’s Neurotic Personality of our time. And, of course, these two also were Europeans trying to understand the world around them—trying to come to terms with living in the US at just that time. Powdermaker, who had been a student of Malinowski’s and a protégé of Sapir’s, had worked in Mississippi as well as in New Ireland. In Melanesia she was the first women, as she pointed out, to do field work alone. In Mi. she was the first white woman, perhaps the first white anthropologist, to work am US blacks—“Negroes” in the language of the time. She also taught a course on Am. minorities and told us to write a research paper on any minority other than our own. In the NY of the 1940s the term covered not only, again in the language of the time, Negroes and Hispanics, but also Jews, Italians and Irish. I wrote about the Italians and it was the most useful assignment I ever had. I learned that what I had taken to be the special unique experiences and situations of my own group were characteristic experiences of immigrant groups to this country. A very useful lesson to learn!

What I didn’t pay attention to when I went to NU, was the fact that P. and MJH took diametrically opposite positions on the significance of Africa for Afro-ams. But of course that scholarly academic issue has long been superceded by politics. And because I didn’t work among US Blacks that was not an issue for me—in Haiti, there could be not question about the relevance of Africa.

Here I should say something about women faculty:
Later, in my senior year, I took a course with Levi Strauss, at the New School, in order to be able to graduate early. He too was struggling to find his way around his US experience. He later wrote about that.