

Morris Edward Opler

May 16, 1907 — May 13, 1996

Cornell University Professor Emeritus Morris Edward Opler, died Monday, May 13, 1996, in Norman, Oklahoma.

He was born May 16, 1907, in Buffalo, New York. His academic career began at the University of Buffalo, where he was graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Sociology in 1929 and an M.A. degree in Anthropology in 1930. He received his Doctorate from the University of Chicago in 1933.

He was a Fellow of the Social Science Research Council in 1932-33 and again in 1946 and 1947. He served as research assistant, then research associate, of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Chicago from 1933-35. From 1935-36, he was a Fellow for the General Education Board. From 1936-37, he was an assistant anthropologist with the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

He began his teaching career in 1937-38 as a visiting lecturer in the Department of Sociology at Reed College in Oregon. He served as Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Claremont College in California from 1938-42. During that time, he also was a summer lecturer for the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Wisconsin. He was named a Fellow of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation from 1942-43.

From 1943-44, during World War II, Dr. Opler served as a social science analyst with the War Relocation Authority in Manzanar, California, site of one of the Japanese-American interment camps. In 1944, he moved to Washington, D.C., to become a social-science analyst with the Office of War Information. In 1945, he was appointed as deputy chief and then as chief of the Foreign Morale Analysis division with the Office of War Information (later under the Department of State), and served until 1946. In the fall of 1945, he was visiting professor at Howard University in Washington, D.C., and in 1946-48, was an assistant professor at Harvard University.

Dr. Opler became Professor of Anthropology and Asian Studies at Cornell University in 1948, and taught at Cornell until he retired in 1969, and was named Professor Emeritus.

A renowned author, researcher, and teacher, he joined the faculty of the University of Oklahoma in 1969, where he was Director of the National Endowment for the Humanities Postdoctoral Fellow Program in American Indian Studies from 1971-72.

He held membership in many professional and honorary societies including Sigma Xi, Phi Beta Kappa, Alpha Kappa Delta, and Phi Delta Kappa. He was a Fellow of the American Anthropological Association, serving on its executive board from 1949-52, as president-elect from 1961-62, and as president for the term 1962-63. He was a Fellow of the Society for Applied Anthropology and the American Folklore Society.

His wife, Lucille, served as a dedicated partner in his work. Although the Oplers did not have any children of their own, they “parented” numerous students through their educational pursuits.

He is survived by his wife, Lucille, of Norman, Oklahoma.

Office of the Dean of the University Faculty