

ANTHROPOLOGY 101: CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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Pettengill Hall #163
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to social or cultural anthropology. It is not, however, a survey course which attempts to cover briefly all the important topics in the field. The goal of the course is to explore in depth one of the fundamental insights that the anthropological study of human cultures has to offer: the insight that the reality we inhabit is socially or culturally constructed. People who live in different cultures, in other words, inhabit different realities.

The course begins with readings on anthropology, anthropological fieldwork, and colonialism, which introduce the concepts of cultural relativity and ethnocentrism. We then read an important theoretical statement of the argument for the social construction of reality and test it by considering the proposition that both racial categories and gender categories do not reflect biological reality, but are social constructs that vary from culture to culture. Next we examine anthropological approaches to the study of symbols and rituals. The course concludes with two detailed case studies of indigenous groups whose encounters with European industrial and capitalist societies are paradoxically both very similar and very different.

This syllabus is available on line on the world wide web at:
<http://www.bates.edu/anthropology/files/2010/07/anth101syllabusW12.pdf>. There are links from the web site containing the syllabus to other web sites where required readings for the course can be found.

After most readings you will find some discussion questions. Please look at these questions before doing the assigned readings and think about them as you read and again afterward. These and other issues will form the basis for class discussion. Readings should be completed before class on the date indicated.

REQUIRED BOOKS

Achebe, Things Fall Apart
Berger and Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality
Kessler and McKenna, Gender
Turner, The Forest of Symbols
Angilirq, Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner (also available on reserve)
Chagnon, Yanomamo
Coursepack

RESERVE READINGS, LADD LIBRARY

Angilirq, Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner (also available on reserve)
 Bloom, "The Body Lies," The New Yorker
 Levy, "Either/Or," The New Yorker
 Hicks & White: "Nunavut: Innu Self Determination"
 Packet of Readings on "Race and Ethnicity"
 Spradley & McCurdy, Conformity & Conflict
 Student Papers by Lewin, Harvie, McLain, Haskell, Hare, Flynn, Monty and Nelson
This We Believe
 Tierney, "The Fierce Anthropologist"
Yanomamo Interactive, CD-Rom
 Bohannan, "Shakespeare in the Bush," also in coursepack
 Brace, "A Four Letter Word Called 'Race'"

TOPICS AND READINGS

January 9

Organization of the Course

1. The Nature of Anthropological Inquiry: Cultural Relativity, Ethnocentrism, and the Concept of Culture

January 11

Bohannan, "Shakespeare in the Bush." Reserve. In Conformity and Conflict, also in coursepack.

Miner, "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema." Coursepack.

- Why is the Bohannan article humorous?
- Is Bohannan's position anthropologically sound? Is the Tiv's?
- Does Hamlet have the same meaning for the Tiv and for Bohannan?
- What does it mean to say anthropologists are engaged in "cultural translation"?
- Can you translate "ghost" into the language of the Tiv?
- What is your reaction to the Nacirema and their culture?
- Does Miner's analysis of Nacirema body rituals constitute good anthropology?
- How do you think the Nacirema themselves would react to Miner's analysis?

January 13

Achebe, Things Fall Apart, pp. 3-109.

- Is Things Fall Apart fiction or non-fiction? Does it matter?
- Is Things Fall Apart an account of an insider or an outsider with respect to Ibo culture? Whose account would be more objective?

- What do we learn about gender roles in Ibo culture from Things Fall Apart?
- How can you make sense of Ibo practices such as the oracle, Ezinma's case; and rain making? Is this magic, superstition, or religion?

January 16

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

January 18

Achebe, pp. 110-209.

- Can Ibo gods harm people?
- Why do "Things Fall Apart?" Could the tragic events portrayed here have been avoided? How?
- What role does anthropology have to play in such situations?
- Who converts to Christianity? Why?

January 20

Discussion

Websites:

Fact Sheet on the Ogoni Struggle

<http://www.ratical.org/corporations/OgoniFactS.html>

Ken Saro-Wiwa

<http://www.remembersarowiwa.com/>

Shell Nigeria

<http://www.shellnigeria.com/>

- Compare and contrast the situation of the Ibo, as presented by Achebe, and the situation of the Ogoni, as presented on the website.
- How do you evaluate information you gain from websites?
- What is the relationship between Shell and the Nigerian government? What roles do they play in the Ogoni struggle?
- How does the existence of the World Wide Web affect the balance of power in this struggle?

2. The Social Construction of Reality

January 23

Berger and Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality, pp. 1-53.

- What is the nature of everyday reality?
- What is the relationship between objective and subjective reality?
- What is the role of language in the social construction of reality? Are we "prisoners" of the language we speak?
- What is the difference between the way beavers and human beings build dams?
- Is there such a thing as human nature? If so, what is it?
- What is the relationship between biological factors (nature) and cultural factors (nurture) in human social life?

January 25

Berger and Luckmann, pp. 53-128.

- What is the difference between objectification and reification?
- What are some examples of institutionalization?

How are the following relationships legitimated in American culture:

1. The relationship between a 10 year old child and the adult male living with the child?
2. The relationship between a 40 year old person and the person he or she is "living with?"
3. Relationships between humans and animals?
4. Relationships between men and women?
5. Relationships between the "races"?

January 27

Discussion

3. The Social Construction of "Race"

January 30

Before reading the assignment, write down answers to these questions:

- How many races exist?
- Name them.
- What is the definition of "race"?

Mukhopadhyay, Henze, and Moses, How Real is Race, pp. 1-14, 39-55, 61-74, 105-113, 145-159.

Go to the following website, follow the instructions there, and record your score. How many people did you classify correctly?

http://www.pbs.org/race/002_SortingPeople/002_01-sort.htm

Then go to the following site and follow the instructions there:

http://www.pbs.org/race/002_SortingPeople/002_02-traits.htm

After reading the assignment, write down answers to these questions:

- Do races exist as biological phenomena?
- Do races exist as cultural constructs?
- What is the definition of "race"?

Additional questions for discussion:

- How do humans vary biologically?
- What is the difference between a "race" and an ethnic group?
- What is the difference between a "race" and a breeding population?
- What is the relationship between everyday common sense, or "folk" categories and scientific categories?
- What does it mean to say "races" exist? How do "races" exist?
- Are you a racist if you classify people into races or if you believe races exist as biological phenomena?

February 1

Brace, "A Four Letter Word Called 'Race'." Coursepack and on reserve.

February 3

Packet of Readings on "Race and Ethnicity." Reserve.

"Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity." Coursepack.

- Are the categories used in the U.S. for census or affirmative action purposes "scientifically valid"?
- Should they be changed? Why? How?
- What is the difference between a "race" and an ethnic group? Are Hispanics a "race" or an ethnic group?
- How does reading about "racial" categories in South Africa change your view on the existence of races?
- Do you think a person can change "race"?
- How do you determine a person's "race"? Is "descent" or "appearance" more important?

February 6

Discussion

4. The Social Construction of Gender

February 6

Evening Film: The Crying Game

February 8

Kessler and McKenna, Gender, Preface and Chapters 1 and 2.

- "Race" and "sex" (or "gender") are both categories we assign people to. What are the similarities and differences between these two categories?
- Do "sexes" or "genders" exist? How many are there?
- How do you determine a person's "sex" or "gender"?
- According to Kessler and McKenna, what is the difference between a person's gender attribution, gender assignment, gender identity, and gender role?
- How would you translate berdache into English?
- If you were an anthropologist studying the berdache, what questions would you ask to learn about it?

February 10

Kessler and McKenna, Chapters 3 and 5.

- What is the relationship between biological and cultural factors in shaping various aspects of a person's gender (identity, role, attribution)?
- Can a person change "sex" or "gender"?
- What happens when a person's gender identity and gender assignment conflict?
- What does it mean to say we are all "passing" as males or females?
- How does the study of transsexuals or intersexuals change the way you think about gender?

February 13

Discussion of short papers with peer writing assistants.

Kessler and McKenna, Chapter 6 and Appendix.

Bloom, The Body Lies. Reserve.

Levy, Either/Or, <http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/11/30/091130fa-fact-Levy>

Websites:

The Room for the Wrongly Gender Assigned

http://www.gn.apc.org/inquirer/gender_intro.html

Intersex Society of North America

<http://www.isna.org/>

Medical Treatment of Hermaphroditism
<http://www.gn.apc.org/inquirer/intersex.html>

Press for Change
<http://www.pfc.org.uk/>

February 15

Discussion

5. Ritual and Symbolism

February 17

FIRST SHORT PAPER DUE

Turner, Forest of Symbols, Chapters I and II.

- What does the milk tree mean to the Ndembu?
- How do symbols convey meaning?
- Who decides what symbols mean, the anthropologist or members of the culture the anthropologist is studying?
- Can symbols have unconscious meanings? If so, how can anthropologists study them?
- What does the song Puff the Magic Dragon mean?

Puff the Magic Dragon

Puff the Magic Dragon lived by the sea
 and frolicked in the autumn mist in a land called Honahlee.
 Little Jackie Paper loved that rascal Puff
 and brought him strings and sealing wax and other fancy stuff.
 Together they would travel on a boat with billowed sail.
 Jackie kept a lookout perched on Puff's gigantic tail.
 Noble kings and princes would bow when ere they came.
 Pirate ships would lower their flag when Puff roared out his name.
 A dragon lives forever, but not so little boys.
 Painted wings and giant strings make way for other toys.
 One gray night it happened. Jackie Paper came no more,
 and Puff that mighty dragon, he ceased his fearless roar.
 His head was bent in sorrow. Green scales fell like rain
 Puff no longer went to play along the cherry lane.
 Without his lifelong friend Puff could not be brave.
 So Puff that might dragon sadly slipped into his cave.

- Is the meaning of a text determined by the intention of the author or the interpretation of the reader?
- Can a person engage in sexual harassment without intending to?

February 27

This We Believe. This We Live. The Baltimore Catechism, "The Eucharist." Lessons 26 - 28. Coursepack.

- What does the sacrament of the Eucharist mean?
- Why do Christians take communion?
- How would you respond to an anthropologist who interpreted the Eucharist as an example of both cannibalism and human sacrifice? Would this be a good interpretation of the rite?
- Analyze the Eucharistic miracles described on the web site.

February 29

Discussion

February 29

Evening Film: Walt Disney's Snow White

March 2

Turner, Chapter III.

Magoun and Krappe, The Grimm's German Folktales, "Snow White." Coursepack.
Sexton, "Snow White." Coursepack.

- What do the colors black, white, and red mean to the Ndembu?
- Are they universal symbols? Why?
- What do black, white and red mean in Snow White?
- What do we learn about American and European attitudes toward women and sexuality from the analysis of Snow White?
- How is Disney's version of Snow White different from the Grimm's version? Can you explain these differences?

March 5

Turner, Chapter IV.

Kovic, Born on the Fourth of July, pp. 63-79. Coursepack.

3 short readings on hazing by Bushweller, Sorrell and Alfred University. Coursepack.

In-class Video: ESPN Outside the Lines: Hazing

- What are the component parts of a rite of passage?
- How do rites of passage work? What do they do?
- How can liminal things be disgusting and sacred?
- Think about the effectiveness of rites of passage you have witnessed or participated in.
- What is the distinction between initiation and hazing? Which category does Basic Training in the Marines belong to? Why?

March 7

Discussion

6. Film, Culture, and Politics among the Inuit of the Canadian Arctic**March 9**

Rigby, MacDonald, and Otak. "The Inuit of Nunavut, Canada," in Endangered Peoples of the Arctic, Freeman, ed., pp. 93-103. Coursepack.

Matthiasson, Living on the Land, pp. 24-90. Coursepack.

- What is the difference between "Eskimo" and "Inuit"? Is this an issue of political correctness?
- Are Inuit Canadians?
- What laws should regulate Inuit hunting and whaling practices? Should Inuit be able to hunt endangered species?
- Will the Inuit disappear? Will their culture disappear? Will "things fall apart" for them as they did the Ibo?
- What have been the major periods in Inuit history?
- What were the main components of Canadian contact with the Inuit? What were their motivations and the impact they had on the Inuit?
- Read over the incident involving Robert James (pp. 44 ff). Was he murdered or executed? Why?
- How has Inuit incorporation into the world economic system made them more vulnerable than they were previously?
- How would you feel if you were a non-Inuit living in Nunavut?

March 12

Hicks and White, "Nunavut: Inuit Self-determination Through a Land Claim and Public Government." In Nunavut: Inuit Regain Control of their Lands and their Lives. Dahl, Hicks, and Tull eds. pp. 30-115. Reserve.

Rigby MacDonald, and Otak, pp. 103-111. Coursepack.

- Does Nunavut represent a threat to Canadian sovereignty and territorial integrity? Does Quebec?
- Does Nunavut represent "a race-based partitioning of Canada"? (Hicks and White, p. 79) Is Nunavut Canada's "first Bantustan, an apartheid-style ethnic homeland"? (Hicks and White, p. 80). Does the creation of Nunavut involve preserving Inuit culture "in the Neolithic period" preserved "as a museum piece for the rest of the world to observe"?
- What did the Inuit give up in exchange for the Canadian government's establishment of Nunavut? Why did the Canadian government agree to the creation of Nunavut?
- What advantages do/did the Inuit have over other indigenous groups in Canada? Are the Inuit better off than Native Americans in the U.S.? Why?

- What is the difference between “public government” and “aboriginal self-government?” Which is better? Why?
- What do you think about the failed proposal that would have guaranteed that the Nunavut Legislative Assembly would include an equal number of men and women?

March 12

Evening Film: Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner

- What is your reaction to the film?
- How do you feel listening to people speak a language you do not understand?
- What parts of the movie did you not understand?
- What information do you need in order to understand the film better?
- Is Inuit culture similar to or different from American culture?
- How does the film affect your view of “primitive” cultures?

March 14

Angilirq, Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner, Ethnographic Commentary. pp. 196-237.

Angilirq, Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner, Screenplay. pp. 29-193.

- What is the role of shamanism in Inuit culture? In the film? How would you explain a shaman’s power?
- How is violence dealt with in Inuit culture?
- What is the relationship between Inuit and animals?
- What is the moral system underlying the Atanarjuat legend? The film? How has it changed?
- What do names mean in Inuit culture?
- How was it decided whom Atanarjuat should marry?

March 16

Angilirq, Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner, pp. 7-27.

American Anthropologist, “Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner In Focus.” pp. 820-838. Coursepack.

- Why does the sound track of the film include music from Mongolia, Bulgaria, and Australian Aborigines?
- What does the film mean to an Inuit audience? What does it mean to a Qadlunaat (non Inuit) audience?
- Does the film preserve traditional Inuit culture? Does it reinvent traditional Inuit culture? Does it exploit it?
- Is The Fast Runner an Inuit film or a Canadian film?
- Does the film perpetuate or combat images of the Inuit as “primitive?” As “noble savages?”

7. Kinship, Violence, and the Politics Of Representation: The Yanomamo of the Amazon Basin

March 19

Chagnon, Yanomamo, Forward, Preface, Prologue and Chapter 1, pp. v-43.

In Class Film: A Man Called "Bee": Studying the Yanomamo

- What image does The Man Called "Bee" present of the anthropologist?
- Are the Yanomamo similar to or different from Americans? Does the film emphasize the similarities or the differences?
- Are the Yanomamo "naked"?
- What are the power relationships established by the film between Chagnon, the Yanomamo, and students in this course?
- Comment on the film's claim that "when we look at the Yanomamo we see a glimpse into our past. We see ourselves several times removed, but ourselves nonetheless."
- Comment on the films claim that teaching skills in war is the most important skill for the Yanomamo as a sovereign people to pass on to their children.

March 21

Chagnon, Chapter 2, pp. 45-97.

March 23

Discussion

Chagnon, Chapter 8, pp. 227-260.

In Class Film: Contact: Yanomamo of Brazil

- Compare this film to The Man Called "Bee". How does it change your perception of the Yanomamo?
- Are the Yanomamo a sovereign people?
- What can be done to keep "Things From Falling Apart" for the Yanomamo as they did for the Ibo?

March 26

SECOND SHORT PAPER DUE

"Correspondence." Coursepack.

"Forward to Fourth Edition." Coursepack.

Tierney, "The Fierce Anthropologist," New Yorker, October 9, 2000. Reserve.

- Whose side do you take in the dispute between Carneiro da Cunha and Chagnon? Why?
- Is Chagnon responsible for the mass media's sensationalization of his work?
- Are the Yanomamo a "Fierce People"?

- Was Chagnon right to have eliminated the subtitle "The Fierce People" from his book?
- Do you believe Tierney's charges against Chagnon? Why?

March 28

Chagnon, Chapter 3, 4, and 5, pp. 99-183.

Websites:

Kinship and Social Organization: An Interactive Tutorial

<http://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/anthropology/kintitle.html>

Yanomamo Kinship

http://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/anthropology/tutor/case_studies/yanomamo

- What are the basic principles of the Yanomamo kinship system?
- Who can a Yanomamo marry?
- What is the relationship between kinship and biology?

March 30

Discussion

April 2

In Class Film: The Axe Fight

Chagnon, Chapter 6 and 7 pp. 185-226.

Yanomamo Interactive: The Axe Fight (on CD-ROM)

- What is the relationship between kinship and politics in Yanomamo culture?
- In political conflicts, how do Yanomamo decide which side to take?
- Why do Yanomamo in one village trade with Yanomamo in another village?

April 4 & 6

No class

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Class attendance and participation in class discussion. Regular and valuable contribution to class discussion will raise a student's grade. Poor attendance will lower it.
2. Two short papers based on the readings, 4-5 pages in length. Papers must be submitted in hard copy.
3. Take home final examination.

SCHEDULE OF DUE DATES

Late papers will be graded down unless an extension has been granted.

Feb. 17 — **First Short Paper Due**

March 26 — **Second Short Paper Due**

April 12 — **Take Home Examination (Handed out April 6)**

SHORT PAPERS

The first short paper should deal with the readings on "race," Gender by Kessler and McKenna, or The Social Construction of Reality by Berger and Luckmann. The second paper should deal with Turner's The Forest of Symbols.

In your paper you should apply one of the interpretive or theoretical approaches presented in the assigned readings to some phenomenon of your own or another culture. The goal of this type of paper is for you to use an anthropological theory or method of analysis to discover something new and interesting that you could not have discovered without the benefit of the anthropological readings from the course. It is essential that you state clearly and thoroughly the theoretical perspective you are using in your paper. You should avoid summarizing, describing, and stating the obvious. Get beneath the surface of things and offer an interpretation of what the ritual, institution, social relationship, fairy tale, or television show means. Several classes (including those on The Crying Game, the Eucharist, Snow White, basic training and hazing) will be devoted to just such projects. Please choose a topic that we have not dealt with in class. There are several examples of good student papers on reserve for you to consult while preparing your own paper. Here is a sample outline for the short paper assignment:

- I. Introduction (one paragraph)
- II. Theoretical approach (one page)
- III. Ethnographic description (one page)
- IV. Analysis, in which the theoretical approach is applied in order to interpret the ethnographic data (two pages)
- V. Conclusion (one paragraph)

PEER WRITING ASSISTANTS

Peer writing assistants are a valuable resource to help you all with your writing. They do not replace, but supplement, two other valuable resources which you should take advantage of as well: the Writing Workshop and me, your professor. I am the best person to meet with to discuss the appropriateness of your topic or to discuss specific theoretical ideas or preliminary interpretations. People at the writing workshop are skilled in helping you with a variety of writing tasks. I hope you will take advantage of all these resources and work on improving your writing as well as learning anthropology.

PLEASE NOTE

1. All students are responsible for reading and understanding the Bates College Statement on Academic Honesty. If you have any doubts or questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me.
2. Please bring a hard copy of the assigned readings to class. Readings should be completed before class on the date indicated.
3. There will be several evening film screenings. Attendance is required.
4. Your fellow students and I would appreciate it very much if you arrive in class on time, refrain from getting up and leaving the room during the class hour, turn off your cell phone, and avoid talking with friends during class. If you abuse the privilege of using a computer in class by doing anything other than taking notes, you will lose the privilege. Thank you.