

SOA U300: Reading Culture through Ethnography

Tues/Fri 9:50am-11:30am
315 Shillman Hall

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Office Hours: Fridays, 2pm-4pm, or by appointment

Course Description:

This course is an introduction to ethnography—the primary method and most significant product of cultural anthropology. Described as both “art” and “science,” ethnographic monographs seek to describe, explain, and interpret cultural difference around the world. Recently, however, ethnography has come under increasing scrutiny, as critics raise questions about ethnographic authority, cultural representation, and ethical responsibility. This course examines these issues through close readings of both classic and contemporary ethnographies. We will consider a number of central questions. What is the relationship between ethnographic methods and theoretical understandings of culture? How do power differentials—including a researcher’s age, gender, class, and race—affect fieldwork? What are the repercussions of various representations of culture? What responsibilities do anthropologists have to the people they study?

Assigned Texts:

- 1) Mead, Margaret. 2001 [1928]. *Coming of Age in Samoa*. Harper Perennial Modern Classics.
- 2) Myerhoff, Barbara. 1994. *Number Our Days*. Plume.
- 3) Venkatesh, Sudhir. 2008. *Gang Leader for a Day*. The Penguin Press.
- 4) Gregory, Steven. 2007. *The Devil Behind the Mirror: Globalization and Politics in the Dominican Republic*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 5) Course reader posted on Blackboard.
- 6) Ethnography of your own choosing for analysis and presentation.

Course Requirements:

1) Attendance and Participation (10% of grade)

The two class sessions per week are a primary source of information for the course. You are expected to attend, to have completed required readings ahead of time, and to participate in class discussions. Take notes during lectures and discussions, and be sure that you understand the main points that are covered, any examples that are used, and how they relate to assigned readings. Several films will be shown during class sessions and are also required. Take notes during films just as you would during a lecture. Be sure that you can identify the groups and issues covered in each film, summarize its contents, and relate it to that week's theme. Changes to the class schedule may be made as necessary, but will be announced in advance.

All cell phones, iPods, and other electronic devices should be turned off and put away during class.

2) Midterm and Final Exams (Midterm: 20% of grade, Final: 20% of grade)

There will be one in-class midterm and a cumulative final exam. Make-up exams will be given only in extraordinary (and well documented) situations. If you are having any problems with the exam scheduling, please let me know **before** the exam.

3) Reading Reflections (20% of grade)

Written, 1 page (single spaced) reflections on weekly readings are required for at least **FIVE** weeks throughout the class. These reflections should not simply summarize the readings, but should offer critical comments and raise questions or possible topics for discussion.

Reflections should be posted to the Discussion Board on the course Blackboard site by 8pm the evening before class (either Monday or Thursday night). Reflections posted after this time will not receive credit. One reflection per week (for either Tuesday's or Friday's class) will be counted toward your grade. You are welcome to post more thoughts and comments on the board.

Please read through the reflections that have been posted to prepare for class discussion the next day.

4) Analysis and Presentation of an Ethnography (Paper: 20% of grade; Presentation: 10% of grade)

You will choose one book-length ethnography and write an **8-10 page** (typed, double spaced, 12 pt. font, 1 inch margins) critical review and analysis. This is not simply a summary—think about the theoretical arguments and ethnographic methods of the book, its historical context, the author's background, reactions and reviews (either from within anthropology or outside), the style of presentation, and your own interpretations and reactions.

Hundreds of ethnographies have been written in the last century. You may choose any ethnography that interests you, but must have the book approved. If you are having trouble finding a book, feel free to come to office hours and I can offer suggestions. A 1 paragraph proposal of your choice is due in class on **Tuesday, October 14**.

Your paper is due in class on **Tuesday, December 9**. You must turn in a hard copy for full credit—electronic versions will have points deducted. **Please respect deadlines**. Ten (10) points will be deducted for each day your paper is late. If you cannot turn in your paper on time due to extreme circumstances, you must discuss this with me **before** the due date.

In addition, you will deliver a **10 minute presentation** on the ethnography/group studied to the class at the end of the semester.

Course Schedule and Required Readings:

Week 1 Introduction to the Course and to Ethnography

Fri 9/12 No readings.

Week 2 Beginnings: Malinowski and British Functionalism

Tues 9/16 Stocking, George W. 1985. "The Ethnographer's Magic: Fieldwork in British Anthropology from Tylor to Malinowski." Pg. 70-120 in *Observers Observed*.

Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1953. "The Subject, Method, and Scope of this Enquiry." Pg. 1-25 in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. New York: E.P. Dutton.

Fri 9/19 Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1953. "The Natives of the Trobriand Islands" and "The Essentials of the Kula." Pg. 49-104 in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. New York: E.P. Dutton.

Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1967. Pg. 103-170 in *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*. London: Routledge.

Week 3 Beginnings II: Boasian Anthropology and Cultural Relativism

Tues 9/23 Stocking, George W. 1966. "Franz Boas and the Culture Concept in Historical Perspective." *American Anthropologist* 68(4): 867-882.

Boas, Franz. 1932. "The Aims of Anthropological Research." *Science* 76: 605-613.

Boas, Franz. 1920. "The Methods of Ethnology." *American Anthropologist* 22(4): 311-321.

Fri 9/26 Mead, Margaret. *Coming of Age in Samoa*. Pg. 179-184, xi-85.

Week 4 Ethnographic "Truth": The Mead/Freeman Debate

Tues 9/30 Mead, Margaret. *Coming of Age in Samoa*. Pg. 86-170.

Fri 10/3 Freeman, Derek. 1983. "Preface" and "Mead's Misconstruing of Samoa." Pg. xi-xvii and 281-293 in *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Holmes, Lowell. 1983. "A Tale of Two Studies." *American Anthropologist* 85(4): 929-935.

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 1984. "The Margaret Mead Controversy: Culture, Biology, and Anthropological Inquiry." *Human Organization* 43(1): 85-93.

Week 5 Constructing the “Other”

- Tues 10/7 Griffiths, Alison. 2002. “Science and Spectacle: Visualizing the Other at the World’s Fair.” Pg. 46-85 in *Wondrous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology, and Turn of the Century Visual Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 1991. “Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Poetics and Politics of Otherness.” Pg. 17-44 in *Recapturing Anthropology*, edited by Richard G. Fox. New Mexico: School of American Research Press.
- Fri 10/10 Rosaldo, Renato. 1989. “Imperialist Nostalgia.” Pg. 68-87 in *Culture and Truth*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Starn, Orin. 1991. “Missing the Revolution: Anthropologists and the War in Peru.” *Cultural Anthropology* 6(1): 63-91.

Week 6 When “They” Read What “We” Write

- Tues 10/14 **ETHNOGRAPHY REVIEW PROPOSAL DUE**
- Davis, Dona L. 1993. “Unintended Consequences: The Myth of ‘The Return’ In Anthropological Fieldwork.” Pg. 27-35 in *When They Read What We Write*, edited by Caroline B. Brettell. Westport, Connecticut: Bergin and Garvey.
- Sheehan, Elizabeth A. 1993. “The Student of Culture and the Ethnography of Irish Intellectuals.” Pg. 75-89 in *When They Read What We Write*, edited by Caroline B. Brettell. Westport, Connecticut: Bergin and Garvey.
- Fri 10/17 **MIDTERM EXAM**

Week7 Reflexivity and the Fieldwork Experience

- Tues 10/21 Rabinow, Paul. 1977. Pg. 1-7, 31-69 in *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Venkatesh, Sudhir. *Gang Leader for a Day*. Pg. 1-111.
- Fri 10/24 Venkatesh, Sudhir. *Gang Leader for a Day*. 145-218, 247-283.

Week 8 Native Ethnography

- Tues 10/28 Narayan, Kirin. 1993. “How Native Is a ‘Native’ Anthropologist?” *American Anthropologist* 95(3): 671-686.
- Myerhoff, Barbara. *Number Our Days*. Pg. 1-78.
- Fri 10/31 Myerhoff, Barbara. *Number Our Days*. Pg. 113-281.

- Week 9 Changing Fields: Globalization and Multi-Sited Ethnography**
- Tues 11/4 Passaro, Joanne. 1997. “‘You Can’t Take the Subway to the Field!’: ‘Village’ Epistemologies in the Global Village.” Pg. 147-162 in *Anthropological Locations*, edited by Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson. Berkeley: Univ of CA Press.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 2004. “Parts Unknown: Undercover Ethnography of the Organs-Trafficking Underworld.” *Ethnography* 5(1):29-73.
- Fri 11/7 Gregory, Steven. *The Devil Behind the Mirror*. Pg. 1-91.
- Week 10 Globalization, cont.**
- Tues 11/11 NO CLASS (Veteran’s Day)
- Fri 11/14 Gregory, Steven. *The Devil Behind the Mirror*. Pg. 92-245.
- Week 11 Future Directions?**
- Tues 11/18 Boellstorff, Tom. 2008. Pg. 3-31, 60-117 in *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Fri 11/21 NO CLASS (AAA)
- Week 12 Ethics and Advocacy**
- Tues 11/25 Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 1995. “The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology.” *Current Anthropology* 36(3): 409-440.
- Robins, Steven and Nancy Scheper-Hughes. 1996. “On the Call for a Militant Anthropology: The Complexity of ‘Doing the Right Thing.’” 37(2): 341-346.
- Rohde, David. 2007. “Army Enlists Anthropology in War Zones.” *New York Times*, October 5.
- Fri 11/28 NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)
- Week 13 Presentations**
- Tues 12/2 Presentations
- Fri 12/5 Presentations
- Week 14 Presentations/Wrap-Up and Review**
- Tues 12/9 **ETHNOGRAPHY ANALYSIS DUE**