

# Introduction to Anthropology

21A.100  
MIT Fall 2005

Lecture: T-Th 11-12, Room 32-141 (Stata Center)  
Recitation: T 12-1, Room 66-160 or 56-154

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## Course Description:

Cultural anthropology offers comparative perspectives on the many ways people live in the world. In doing so, it challenges some of our commonly held assumptions about what is normal, natural, and true. We will explore what sorts of questions anthropologists ask, why they ask them, and how they go about answering such questions. The course will focus on what anthropologists study as well as on how we present our research findings, in both written and visual ethnographic genres. Questions guiding the course include: What is culture? How does culture shape and reflect the organization of societies? How are cultures integrated? How are cultures and peoples represented in a global context? We'll explore these through several major themes, including:

- Human Cultural Diversity
- Ritual and The Life Course
- Conceptualizations of Self and Body
- Gender, Kinship, and Family
- Relations of Exchange
- Labor and Social Differentiation
- Science as Cultural Practice

## Course Requirements:

### **Attendance and Participation = 20%**

Attendance is required at lectures and recitations. All students are expected to read the assigned texts for each class prior to that class meeting and to participate in class discussions.

### **Written Assignments = 50%**

There will be five (5) writing assignments (listed below). Essays should be clearly written, present a coherent argument, and show mastery of required materials. Students who need help on the mechanics of writing should consult their recitation instructor or the Writing Center ([web.mit.edu/writing/](http://web.mit.edu/writing/)). In addition to providing us with an ongoing sense of your grasp of the material, these written papers provide you with a record of your own developing anthropological sensibility, and I suggest that you maintain a file of these papers which will be helpful study aids for the exams.

### **Final essay exam = 30%**

Required Texts (available at the Coop; used copies may be found on amazon.com)

Barbara Meyerhoff, *Number Our Days*. Simon & Schuster.  
Marjorie Wolf, *The House of Lim: A Study of a Chinese Family*. Prentice Hall.  
Anne Becker, *Body, Self and Society: The View from Fiji*. U of Pennsylvania.  
Hugh Gusterson, *Nuclear Rites: A Weapons Laboratory at the End of the Cold War*.  
U of California.

All other required readings are available as on the course Stellar site:  
[stellar.mit.edu/S/course/21A/fa05/21A.100/index.html](http://stellar.mit.edu/S/course/21A/fa05/21A.100/index.html)

Outline of Readings and Assignments:

## **The Practice of Anthropology: Concepts and Methods**

### **week 1**

Th. 9/8 Introduction: What is anthropology?

**week 2:** anthropologists and anthropology: culture and the ethnographic method

T. 9/13 British attention to social structure

read: Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) Introduction to *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. Waveland, 1-25.

Horace Miner (1956) Body Ritual Among the Nacirema. *American Anthropologist* 58: 503-507.

Th. 9/15 American interest in culture & personality

read: Margaret Mead (1928) Introduction & The Experience and Individuality of the Average Girl. In *Coming of Age in Samoa*. Morrow Quill, 1-13; 131-157.

Laura Bohannan (1966) Shakespeare in the Bush. *Natural History* 75: 28-33.

**week 3:** doing fieldwork

T. 9/20 view in lecture: *First Contact*

### **first recitation**

read: Hortense Powdermaker (1966) *Stranger and Friend*, W. W. Norton, 49-50; 60-68; 108-125.

Barbara Meyerhoff, *Number Our Days*, Touchstone, 1-39.

discuss “rapport,” the (im)possibility of “going native,” and the ethics of field research

Th. 9/22 interpreting cultural meaning

read: Clifford Geertz (1973) Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight. In *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, 412-453.

Sidney Mintz (1966) Food and its Relationship to Concepts of Power. In *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Culture, and the Past*, Beacon, 17-32.

## The Life Course

### week 4: rites of passage

T. 9/27 ritual and the life course

read: Barbara Meyerhoff, *Number our Days*, Preface and 40-112.

recitation: discuss ritual and social drama

ASSIGNMENT #1 DUE in recitation: what is the ethnographic method? (strengths & weaknesses)

Th. 9/29 birth as a rite of passage

read: Brigitte Jordan (1983) excerpts from *Birth in Four Cultures*, Eden Press, 1-2; 11-53.

### week 5: aging and communal memory in Los Angeles

T. 10/4 view in lecture: "Number Our Days" (30 min.)

read: *Number our Days*, 153-231

recitation: recap thus far

Th. 10/6 read: *Number our Days*, 232-268 **Guest Lecturer: Susan Slymovics**

ASSIGNMENT #2 DUE: reflections on *Number Our Days*

### week 6: gender, kinship, family

T. 10/11 NO CLASS

Th. 10/13 read: Marjorie Wolf, *The House of Lim*, Appleton, Preface; 3-74.

### week 7: gender, kinship, family

T. 10/18 read: *The House of Lim*, 75-148.

Th. 10/20 morality and cultural relativism

read: Nancy Scheper-Hughes, Mother's Love: Death without Weeping, In *Conformity and Conflict: Readings in Cultural Anthropology*, edited by James Spradley and David McCurdy, 9th edition, 1997, Longman.

Heather Paxson, Family Planning, Human Nature, and the Ethical Subject of Sex in Urban Greece. In *Sex in Development: Science, Sexuality, and Morality in Global Perspective*, edited by Vincanne Adams and Stacy Leigh Pigg, Duke, 95-124.

**week 8:** body, self & society

T. 10/25 read: Anne Becker (1995) *Body, Self and Society: A View from Fiji*, Penn, Intro + Chapters 1-3.

Th. 10/27 read: *Body, Self and Society*, chapters 4-6.

**Modern Institutions: Law, Labor, Class, Science**

**week 9:** economic anthropology

T. 11/1 law and society: an introduction **Guest Lecturer: Susan Silbey**

read: Marc Galanter (1974) Why the “Haves” Come Out Ahead: Speculations on the Limits of Legal Change. *Law and Society Review* 9:11-37. (reprint)

Patricia Ewick and Susan Silbey (1999) Common Knowledge and Ideological Critique: The Significance of Knowing That the “Haves” Come Out Ahead. *Law and Society Review* 33(4): 1025-1041.

ASSIGNMENT #3 DUE: cultural and moral relativism

Th. 11/3 relations of exchange

read: Marcel Mauss (1924) *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. W.W. Norton, 2000, 1-31, 33-46.

Paul Bohannan (1950) The Impact of Money on an African Subsistence Economy. *The Journal of Economic History* 19(4): 491-503.

**week 10:** money and labor

T. 11/8 the magic of money and commodity fetishism

read: Aristototele, *The Politics* Book I, 8-10.

Martin Luther (1520) “An Appeal to the Ruling Class,” In *Selections from His Writings*, edited by John Dillenberger. Anchor Books, 1961, 481-83

Michael Taussig (1977) The Genesis of Capitalism amongst a South American Peasantry: Devil’s Labor and the Baptism of Money. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. 19(2): 130-155.

Th. 11/10 wage labor as personal identity and social relation

read: Kath Weston (1991) Production as Means, Production as Metaphor: Women’s Struggle to Enter the Trades. In *Uncertain Terms: Negotiating Gender in American Culture*, edited by Faye Ginsburg and Anna Tsing, Beacon, 137-151.

Carla Freeman (1998) Femininity and Flexible Labor: Fashioning



T. 12/6 read: *Nuclear Rites*, 39-164

Th. 12/8 read: *Nuclear Rites*, 165-250 **Guest Lecturer: Hugh Gusterson**

ASSIGNMENT #5 DUE: science, culture and society

**week 15:** last week of classes

T. 12/13 Wrap-up and review

TBA FINAL EXAM