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/). 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)


All other required readings are available as on the course Stellar site: 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


Th. 9/15   American interest in culture & personality


**week 3**: doing fieldwork

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

   **first recitation**


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

Th. 9/22   interpreting cultural meaning


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


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


week 8: body, self & society


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**


ASSIGNMENT #3 DUE: cultural and moral relativism

Th. 11/3 relations of exchange


week 10: money and labor

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


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

**week 11**: economic and social class

T. 11/15 social reproduction  
**Guest Lecturer: Christine Walley**


Th. 11/17 immigration and citizenship


**ASSIGNMENT #4 DUE: gift relations**

**week 12**: race

T. 11/22 race and human variation  
**Guest Lecturer: Stefan Helmreich**


Th. 11/24 THANKSGIVING

**week 13**: the anthropology of science

T. 11/29 introduction to science studies  
**Guest Lecturer: Candis Callison**


Hugh Gusterson, Preface and 1-37 in *Nuclear Rites*, U of California.

Th. 12/1 view in lecture: *Half Life* (professor at AAA Meetings)

**week 14**: nuclear weapons scientists
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