

AMERICAN [SIC] UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

**Culture & Human Experience:  
Anthropological Approaches to Today's Critical Issues**

ANTH-110/110G-001, Spring 2012  
Monday/Thursday 8:55 a.m.-10:10 a.m., Ward 102

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Office Hours: Battelle-Tompkins T-49, Mondays 2:35-6:35 p.m., and by appointment  
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This course introduces participants to sociocultural anthropology and how it can help us understand today's critical political, economic, and social issues. In addition to introducing some of the theory, history, and methods of the discipline, we will consider how anthropology can help make sense of issues like poverty and inequality, race and racism, gender violence, same sex marriage, the presidential elections, and the wars in the Afghanistan and Iraq.

Above all, the course seeks to introduce the distinct approach of sociocultural anthropology: A way of understanding human beings and the world that strives, to the extent possible, to set aside one's own biases and empathetically understand people from their own perspectives while simultaneously considering the social, cultural, political, economic, and historical contexts in which people live. Most often sociocultural anthropology attempts to build this understanding through the discipline's defining method, *ethnography*. Unlike other social science methods, ethnography stresses living with and participating actively in the lives of others, listening to what people say about their lives, and carefully observing people's lives and the world around them. In sum, I hope to show how anthropology offers tools not just to better understand others but also to better understand ourselves.

This class asks for the active and thoughtful participation of every participant. For each class session, I expect students 1) to complete all of the assigned readings, 2) to think about the readings carefully, and 3) to come prepared to discuss the readings and their relevance in the world around us. Following current events via newspapers, the internet, magazines, and other media will assist your preparation and deepen what I expect to be lively discussions.

The classroom will be a space where everyone is encouraged to express their views freely and to dissent with me and with others, while recognizing one's responsibility to respect the rights of others, including their right to free expression. Throughout the semester, students will have opportunities to shape the direction of the class, choose the subjects of discussion, and improve the course design through regular feedback. The class will emphasize close attention to writing as a craft and as an essential part of producing anthropological and other knowledge. We will also examine anthropological research skills as a distinct way of understanding the world.

## **PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE**

Careful and thoughtful reading and active participation in class, in addition to written assignments, are the most important elements of this course. I expect advance notice for any classes you will miss. **More than four absences without acceptable make-up work will seriously endanger your getting credit for the course.**

Because this class stresses active participation in class discussions and respect for all course participants, computers and other personal electronic devices may never be used in the classroom. If there is a legitimate reason to make an exception to this rule, please come speak to me. Thanks for your understanding.

## **CRITICAL REACTION PARAGRAPHS AND FEEDBACK**

For each class period I expect you to submit a 1 paragraph “critical reaction” paper in response to that day’s assigned readings. The critical reaction must be submitted typed, double spaced, and on paper at the beginning of each class. Your reaction should offer thoughtful reflection about each of the readings. While briefly summarizing the main points of each reading will be helpful, go beyond this to offer your own original thoughts about the texts. In this way, the reactions should help you work through and organize your thinking about the readings and clarify the issues you want to discuss each week. The paragraphs can include your ideas, critiques, questions, challenges, inspirations, uncertainties, connections, comparisons, concerns, applications, implications, and other thoughts. The reactions will not be graded, but thoughtful, focused papers will indicate effort and engagement in the course.

The reaction is also an opportunity to ask any general questions about the class, anthropology, and things that are confusing in the course. You can also use it to give me feedback of any kind about my teaching, ways I could improve the class, and general frustrations or inspiration. I also welcome emailed questions (best if the question is urgent) as well as anonymous questions or comments placed in my mailbox next to the Anthropology Department office, Battelle-Tompkins, T-20.

Be sure to include your name and the date of the class on the reaction. **If for some reason you are unable to turn in a paper, you must write this on a piece of paper and turn it in at the start of class (this will allow us to count you as having attended the class).**

**You are permitted to miss four reaction papers throughout the course of the semester without it affecting your grade,** although you will still be responsible for all assigned material for the midterm, final, and final paper.

## **READING SUGGESTIONS**

I generally believe that underlining/highlighting and note-taking are essential parts of reading assigned academic texts. Another useful way to help you read carefully and ensure that you are prepared for class is to answer the following questions for each reading assignment. I strongly suggest writing out the answers and other thoughts inspired by a reading. These notes will later

help you prepare for the exam, write the final paper, and even make use of your readings in future classes and other academic work.

### **Suggested Questions to Ask of Each Reading**

- 1) What is the main argument or thesis of the reading? (What was the author's goal in writing?)
- 2) What evidence does the author provide to support the main argument? What methods did the author employ to collect evidence?
- 3) Are you convinced by the author's argument? Why or why not?
- 4) What is the significance of the reading—both for academic thought and the larger world?
- 5) What questions does the reading raise for you? What other thoughts, ideas, inspiration?

### **WRITING REQUIREMENTS**

All written assignments must be double spaced, 12-pt. font, with 1-inch margins on all sides, and comply with generally accepted rules of writing, style, and proper academic citation. For guidance, see the *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing* (see <http://thewritesource.com/mla.htm>); the *Chicago Manual of Style* (see <http://library.osu.edu/sites/guides/chicagogd.php>); or the American Anthropological Association style guide: [http://www.aaanet.org/pubs/style\\_guide.htm](http://www.aaanet.org/pubs/style_guide.htm).

*All writing assignments must be turned in on paper (i.e., not electronically) at the beginning of the class on which they are due, unless otherwise indicated or arranged. If there is a legitimate reason why you must turn in an assignment late, you should contact me more than 24 hours before the due date to explain the problem and make other arrangements.*

### **WRITING GUIDE**

The following are a few basics for all written assignments. For more detailed assistance, visit the Writing Center, Battelle-Tompkins 228, 202-885-2991 for appointments, or see me or your T.A.

- Develop original ideas!
- Have an engaging title
- Avoid passive verbs
- Avoid gendered words (e.g., “chairman”; instead, “chair”)
- Think carefully about every word you use
- Make your writing compelling and engaging
- Avoid all spelling and grammatical errors (use a spelling and grammar checking function on your word processing software)
- Cite any original idea or information taken from other sources with an endnote, footnote, or in-text citation
- Be clear and concise
- Compile all sources used in a bibliography, works cited, or works consulted section at the end of the paper, using a consistent citation style from one of the options styles above
- Your final project should also have a strong, clear thesis set out most likely in the first paragraph or two; your ideas should be organized coherently; you should make effective use of class readings and discussions as well as outside sources; a conclusion should sum up your findings.

## **CLASS FACILITATION**

Every Thursday, a group of 3-4 students will be asked to serve as facilitators for part of a day's class discussion. The aim is to stimulate discussion with one provocative question or argument that addresses the key substance of the week's readings and what your group thinks we should be discussing. Most likely you will want to frame the week's readings in some way, but do not simply regurgitate what everyone will already have read. Most importantly, be sure to offer a critical question or argument about the readings and topics at hand that provides a lively springboard for discussion and critical thinking. Think about how best to creatively engage the class, and don't be afraid to take risks! *Do not*, however, simply summarize the material, offer a perfunctory powerpoint, tell us what you liked and didn't like, provide biographical material about authors, substitute a long video clip for a thoughtful presentation, or read an unfocused list of questions. You should take no more than 5-7 minutes before allowing the rest of class to join the discussion. Generally groups will facilitate discussion at the beginning or mid-way through each class period. If you have any technological requirements, please arrive early to class to allow sufficient time to set-up.

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

- 1) Critical reaction paragraphs, typed and on paper, turned in at the beginning of each class.
- 2) Meeting with me, due by February 6.
- 3) Mid-semester review exercise, March 29.
- 4) One group discussion facilitation during the course of the semester.
- 5) Final review exercise, May 7.

## **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

By registering for this class and at AU, you have acknowledged your awareness of the Academic Integrity Code (<http://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/code.htm> or see the "Student Handbook and Planner"). You are responsible for familiarizing yourself and complying with all its standards of academic conduct, including those related to plagiarism. I take plagiarism and academic dishonesty very seriously, and I am required to report cases to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, whose policy is to fail students for the course. Please read the university's Academic Integrity Code closely, and be sure to ask me if you have any questions.<sup>1</sup>

Special Note: In addition to plagiarizing others, it is possible to plagiarize oneself when using your own previously written material without proper citation. To avoid self-plagiarism and related academic dishonesty, you must cite any and all material that you have written for any purposes other than for this class. If you want to use material written for another class in this course, you must ask for advance permission to do so.

## **MY RESPONSIBILITIES**

I pledge to the best of my ability to make this as enriching and exciting an academic experience as possible for everyone; to come prepared to lead engaging class sessions; to create a safe and

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Manson, Academic Affairs Administrator, College of Arts and Sciences, American University, Washington, DC, email communications, January 8, 2008 and January 8, 2009.

nurturing academic environment in the classroom that encourages the free exchange of ideas; to remain open to all dissent, critique, suggestions about the class, and other feedback; to adapt the course as appropriate in response to student feedback; to meet personally with students during my office hours and at other times by appointment or otherwise to discuss any aspect of the course; to read carefully and return all written assignments as quickly as I can; and to be fair in my evaluation and in the grading that AU unfortunately requires me to complete.

## **LEARNING AND LIFE RESOURCES**

If you encounter any difficulty this semester for any reason that affects your participation in the course, please don't hesitate to speak with our T.A. or with me. In addition to the department's assistance, the university offers a variety of learning and life resources to take advantage of. See: <https://my.american.edu/content.cfm?load=includes/help.cfm> or the following:

Academic Support Center: 885-3360, MGC 243, [www.american.edu/ocl/asc](http://www.american.edu/ocl/asc).

Counseling Center: 885-3500, MGC 214, [www.american.edu/ocl/counseling](http://www.american.edu/ocl/counseling).

Disability Support Services: 885-3315 (V/TDD), MGC 206, [www.american.edu/ocl/dss](http://www.american.edu/ocl/dss).

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please notify me in a timely manner with a letter from the Academic Support Center or Disability Support Services so that we can make arrangements to address your needs.

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender & Ally Resource Center: 885-3347, MGC 201, [www.american.edu/ocl/glbta](http://www.american.edu/ocl/glbta).

International Student and Scholar Services: 885-3340/50, Butler 410, [www.american.edu/ocl/iss](http://www.american.edu/ocl/iss).

Judicial Affairs and Mediation Services: 885-3328, Butler 408, [www.american.edu/ocl/jams](http://www.american.edu/ocl/jams).

Multicultural Affairs: 885-3651, MGC 204, [www.american.edu/ocl/oma](http://www.american.edu/ocl/oma).

New Student Programs: 885-3303/74, Butler 407, [www.american.edu/ocl/orientation](http://www.american.edu/ocl/orientation).

Student Health Center: 885-3380, McCabe Hall 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, [www.american.edu/healthcenter](http://www.american.edu/healthcenter).

## **REQUIRED TEXTS**

All the texts should be available in the campus bookstore, on 2-hour reserve in the library, and at inexpensive prices when purchased (often used) online. All other required readings will be available on Blackboard, on 2-hour reserve in the library, on the internet, or in class. If, for any reason, you have difficulty purchasing the books, please let me know. All other required readings will be available on Blackboard, on 2-hour reserve in the library, on the internet, or in class.

MacLeod, Jay. *Ain't No Makin' It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1995.

Farmer, Paul. *AIDS and Accusation: Haiti and the Geography of Blame*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006.

## **CLASS SCHEDULE**

All assignments and readings are due on the date indicated.

### **Notes for where to find texts**

B=Book

BBe=Blackboard E-reserves

BBx=Blackboard External Links

### **January 19: Introductions**

#### **January 23**

Liebow, Elliot. *Tally's Corner: A Study of Negro [sic] Streetcorner Men*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003. Pp. 19-45. BBe

Miner, Horace. "Body Rituals among the Nacirema." *American Anthropologist* 58, no. 3 (1956): 503-507. BBx

#### **January 26**

Myerhoff, Barbara. *Number Our Days*. New York: Touchstone, 1978. Pp. 8-19. BBx: See the end of "Ethnographic Writing Selections #3"

Belmonte, Thomas. *The Broken Fountain*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989. BBx: See the end of "Ethnographic Writing Selections #3" and the beginning of #4.

Geertz, Clifford. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." In *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973. Read highlighted sections.

#### **January 30**

Review Miner, Liebow, Geertz; bring in participant-observation assignment notes from TDR or another eatery.

## **POVERTY, INEQUALITY, CLASS: IS THERE A "CULTURE OF POVERTY"?**

### **February 2**

MacLeod, Jay. *Ain't No Makin' It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1995. Preface, Chaps. 1-2 [Chap. 2 is hard, so do your best, but we will discuss it in class.] B

### **February 6**

**MEETING WITH ME BY THIS DATE**

*Ain't No Makin' It*, chaps. 3-5. B

**February 9**

*Ain't No Makin' It*, chaps. 6-7. B

**February 13**

*Ain't No Makin' It*, chaps. 8, 11. [Read other parts of Part II and the appendices if you have time.] B

**February 10-12: Lavender Language Conference 19**

**February 16**

Graber, David. Selected articles. BBx

[For further reading on Graeber, see: Graeber, David. *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004. Available at: <http://ramshackleglory.com/paradigm14.pdf>.]

**“RACE” AND ANTHROPOLOGY: STARING ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE FACE**

**February 20**

Smedley, Audrey. Introduction and Chapter 1. In *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*. Pp. 1-36. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. BBe

Baker, Lee. *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896-1954*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998. Pp. 1-25 [skim pp. 5-6]. BBe

**February 23**

Goodman, Alan H. “Biological Diversity and Cultural Diversity: From Race to Radical Bioculturalism.” In Susser and Patterson. Pp. 29-45. BBe

Sacks, Karen Brodtkin. “How Did Jews Become White Folks?” In *Race*. Roger Sanjek and Steven Gregory, eds. Pp. 78-102. BBe

**February 27**

Pager, Devah. “The Mark of a Criminal Record.” *Focus* 23, no. 2 (2003): 44-46. BBx

Baker, Lee. “Racism, Risk, and the New Color of Dirty Jobs.” In *The Insecure American: How We Got Here & What We Can Do about It*. Hugh Gusterson and Catherine Besteman, eds. Pp. 140-161. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010. BBe

Film in class: *Race: The Power of an Illusion*

**March 1**

Lancaster, Roger. “Republic of Fear: The Rise of Punitive Governance in America.” In Gusterson and Besteman, eds. Pp. 63-77. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010. BBe

Davis, Angela. "Masked Racism: Reflections on the Prison Industrial Complex". *Color Lines*. September 10, 1998. Available at [http://www.colorlines.com/archives/1998/09/masked\\_racism\\_reflections\\_on\\_the\\_prison\\_industrial\\_complex.html](http://www.colorlines.com/archives/1998/09/masked_racism_reflections_on_the_prison_industrial_complex.html) BBx

**March 5: MID-TERM REVIEW**

**March 8: MID-TERM REVIEW EXERCISE**

**March 11-18: SPRING BREAK, NO CLASS**

**GENDER, SEX, AND SEXUALITY: ANTHROPOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDINGS**

**March 19**

Morgen, Sandra. "Gender and Anthropology: Introductory Essay." In *Gender and Anthropology: Critical Reviews for Research and Teaching*. Sandra Morgen, ed. Pp. 1-20. Arlington, VA: American Anthropological Association, 1999.

Martin, Emily. "The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles." *Signs* 16, no. 3 (1991). Pp. 485-501.

**March 22**

Enloe, Cynthia. Selections from *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. Pp. xi-18, 65-92. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989. BBe

Abu-Lughod, Lila. "Do Muslim Women Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others." *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002). Pp. 783-790. BBe

**March 26**

Gagnon, John H., and Richard G. Parker. "Introduction: Conceiving Sexuality." In *Conceiving Sexuality: Approaches to Sex Research in a Postmodern World*. John H. Gagnon and Richard G. Parker, eds. Pp. 3-16. London: Routledge, 1995. BBe

Weston, Kath. "The Monkey Cage and the Red Desert." In *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*. Pp. 1-20. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997 ed. BBe

**March 29**

Puar, Jasbir K., and Amit S. Rai. "Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots." *Social Text* vol. 20, no. 3 (2002):117-148. BBx

*Optional:* Rubin, Gayle S. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality." In *Culture, Society and Sexuality: A Reader*. Richard Parker and Peter Aggleton, eds. Pp. 143-178. London: UCL Press, 1999. BBe

## COMPLICATING CULTURE: POLITICAL ECONOMY, HISTORY, AND GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

### April 2

Wolf, Eric. "Introduction." *Europe and the People without History*. Pp. 3-7 [optional: pp. 7-23]. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982. BBe

Farmer, Paul. *AIDS and Accusation: Haiti and the Geography of Blame*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006. Prefaces, Introduction, Part I.

### April 5

*AIDS and Accusation*, Part IV [note out of order]; at least one of Chapter 7, 8, or 9; Chapter 10.

### April 9

*AIDS and Accusation*, Part III, chap. 18.

### April 12

*AIDS and Accusation*, chaps. 19-22.

### April 16

Kidder, Tracy

2003 *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Cure the World*. New York: Random House. Pp. 1-44. BBe

## WAR, EMPIRE, AND PUBLIC ANTHROPOLOGY: LOOKING INWARD

*April 17: Global Day of Action on Military Spending event TBA*

### April 19

Lutz, Catherine. "Warmaking as the American Way of Life." In Gusterson and Besteman, eds. Pp. 45-62. BBe

Bacevich, Andrew. *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Pp. ix-7. BBx

Johnson, Chalmers. "Republic or Empire: A National Intelligence Estimate on the United States," *Harper's Magazine*, January 2007: 63-7. BBx

### April 23

Perry, Celia. "My Bases Are Bigger than Your Country." *Mother Jones*, August 21, 2008. <http://motherjones.com/politics/2008/08/my-bases-are-bigger-your-country>.

Johnson, Chalmers. "America's Unwelcome Advances." *Mother Jones*, August 21, 2008. Available at <http://motherjones.com/politics/2008/08/americas-unwelcome-advances?page=1>.

Kaplan, Robert. "Mission Creep Dispatch: Robert Kaplan." *Mother Jones*, September 15, 2008. Available at <http://motherjones.com/mojo/2008/09/mission-creep-dispatch-robert-kaplan>.

"Empire of Bases 2.0: Does the Pentagon Really Have 1,180 Foreign Bases?" Tom Dispatch, January 9, 2011. Available at [http://www.tomdispatch.com/blog/175338/tomgram%3A\\_nick\\_turse%2C\\_the\\_pentagon%27s\\_planet\\_of\\_bases](http://www.tomdispatch.com/blog/175338/tomgram%3A_nick_turse%2C_the_pentagon%27s_planet_of_bases).

*Optional:* Read other dispatches from the *Mother Jones* "Mission Creep" series on military bases at: <http://motherjones.com/politics/2008/08/table-contents>.

In class film: *Standing Army*

### **April 26**

Vine, David. "Homesick for Camp Justice." *Mother Jones*, August 21, 2008. <http://motherjones.com/politics/2008/08/homesick-camp-justice>.

### **April 30: REVIEW**

### **May 7: FINAL REVIEW EXERCISE, 8:55AM-11:25AM**

### **EVALUATION (AND, UNFORTUNATELY, GRADING)**

I expect your full participation in all aspects of class sessions and the completion of all assignments. My evaluation and (what I hope you will find to be) constructive feedback on your work will primarily come in the form of written comments returned to you on your assignments. Because AU requires me to assign final grades, I will do so primarily based on class participation, the quality of and energy devoted to assignments, and improvement over the course of the semester. I will assign grades in accordance with the following distributions and AU guidelines:

Reading, attendance, and class participation: 40 points

Group presentation: 10 points

Final review exercise: 25 points

Mid-term review exercise: 25 points

Improvement and effort: 5 bonus points

A: Superior, original, thoughtful work in completion of all course requirements;

B: Very good work in completion of course requirements;

C: Satisfactory work in completion of course requirements;

D: Unsatisfactory or incomplete work in course requirements and/or a failure to meet minimum attendance requirements;

F: Failure to meet minimum course standards for assignments, participation, attendance.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See "Guideline of a General Education Syllabus," online document, available at <http://www.american.edu/academics/gened/faculty.htm>.

**GENERAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS**

They are changing beginning next fall, but (as far as I know) this course is and will be part of General Education Area 3.