MAP / Societies and the Social Sciences:

anthropological perspectives

V55.0640
Spring 2006
M-W 12:30 – 1:45, Silver 408

Prof. Jeff D. Himpele
Office: Dept. of Anthropology
25 Waverly Place, Rm. 604
Phone: 212.998.8562
e-mail: jeff.himpele@nyu.edu
Office Hours: Wed. 2:00 – 3:00

Course Description:
• What is the significance of the anthropological idea of culture for understanding the diversity of human social practices, structures, beliefs and symbols? • What is human nature and why have theories of it been so compelling? • What assumptions about culture and human nature are shaping how we understand and organize our world in the present?

In the first half of this course, we attempt these big questions by examining classic claims and assumptions about human nature and human differences that have been offered by psychology, economics, biology and philosophy, for example, and we then re-consider them in light of cross-cultural studies (ethnography) and the anthropological concept of culture. In the second half of the course, we use the idea of culture to examine encounters and interactions between societies, with an emphasis on European colonialism and the global present. Did some people have more culture than others, and are some cultures disappearing? Can capitalism be understood through theories of human nature and culture? In looking at modern situations of culture and power, we will study how a contemporary indigenous society engages with domination by using modern media as a means of producing their own culture and as a form of empowerment. We conclude the course with a consideration of how social forces shape the representations of culture in popular media and tourism. If we want to ask how it might be possible to see past our biases in order to represent reality accurately, or authentically, what assumptions do we first make in asking this question? What are the historical circumstances for asking the question? What is the impact of indigenous media and tourism on the classic anthropological idea of culture and on the dynamics of ethnographic research and representation?

Readings and Course Materials:
• All of the course readings will be available for download from the course BlackBoard web-site. There are no books or readers that you will have to purchase. Students are expected to check regularly the course web-site as well as their NYU e-mail accounts. Announcements regarding any changes or upcoming work as well as some course handouts also may be available from the web-site. Access to the web-site and the downloads are available only to students who are registered for the course through the “Academics” link on their NYU Home page on the Web (home.nyu.edu, or at classes.nyu.edu/index.html).
Requirements:
• Students are required to attend all Lectures and Recitations, read all of the required texts on the syllabus, and turn in written work as assigned. A substantial part of the intellectual work and grading for the course is based on your work in Lecture and Recitations, which will consist of discussions of various forms. You should consider your notes from Lectures and Recitations as essential “texts” in the course, and therefore, attendance is required. Students are expected to come to Lectures having done the assigned reading and attend Recitation with a hard copy of the reading and written assignments on hand, as assigned, and ready to actively contribute to the discussion.

Participation in Lecture discussions will be encouraged throughout the semester, and such engagement with our material will promote your understanding and your grade. If general attendance in Lecture declines, I will circulate a sign-in sheet at the beginning of each class and include attendance directly in the formulation of the final grade.

(1) 4 Essays: There will be 4 essays (5-7 pages) assigned during the semester, corresponding to each of the four parts of the course. All of the material presented in lectures, films and the readings may be part of these essays. Late assignments will not be accepted. Check our schedule before planning any travel; no other arrangements will be made.

(2) Weekly Written Work: To help you focus and clarify our work in class each week, short discussion questions and assignments on the lectures, films or readings will be posted on the Blackboard web-site for you to respond and bring to Recitation. A substantial part of the grading for the course is based on these papers and they will only be accepted in the Recitation meeting for which they are due. Retain a copy of your work to use as a reference for discussion and as a backup. You are only required to turn in 11 papers for any of the 14 weeks in which assignments will be given. You may skip any 3 weeks that you choose, but not 2 weeks in a row; with this flexibility, no papers will be accepted after class or late. These papers will receive up to 2 points each, based on how well they demonstrate that you have thoughtfully considered them in light of the course, make insightful connections, and point to interesting issues or raise new questions. You may choose to do more than 11; if you do so, only your highest 11 scores will be used in calculating final grades.

Grades:

Total points available for the course: 100 points.
- Essays (2@21 points, 2@18 points) 78 pts.
- Weekly Written Assignments (any 11@2 pts. each) 22 pts.

The total points for all written work will set a 10 point range within which the final grade will fall. Specifically, up to 5 points will be added or subtracted from the total of written work for attendance and participation in Recitation and Lecture which will then determine the final grade for the semester. There will not be a “curve” applied to everyone’s final grades at the end of the semester. Points for attendance and participation can make a significant impact on final letter
A: 100-93 = A; 92.9-90 = A-
B: 87-89.9 = B+; 83-86.9 = B; 80-82.9 = B-
C: 77-79.9 = C+; 73-76.9 = C; 70-72.9 = C-
D: 67-69.9 = D+; 63-66.9 = D; 60-62.9 = D-
F: <60 = F

Teaching Assistants:
Luther Elliott          Susie Rosenbaum
luther@nyu.edu         susier@nyu.edu

The Teaching Assistants in this course will hold required weekly Recitations and are directly involved in reading and evaluating your work. Please see the course website Staff Information page for details regarding Recitations, room schedules, and office hours.

Course Schedule:  (Please note that the schedule may be modified to suit our discussions. Any changes for readings and writing assignments will be posted on our web-site.)

PART ONE - THE IDEA OF CULTURE

Week 1 – INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE AND THE ROOTS OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORY
Wed. 1/18   Course format, procedures, etc.
            What do we already know about human nature and culture?

WEEK 2 – VICTORIAN SCIENCE AND THE SOCIAL EVOLUTIONARY MODEL
Mon. 1/23   Greco-Roman and Biblical Models; European Colonialism
Wed. 1/25   Edward B Tylor, “Primitive Culture”

WEEK 3 – FROM CIVILIZATION TO CULTURES
Mon. 1/30   Lewis H. Morgan, “Ancient Society”
Wed. 2/1    Franz Boas, “The Methods of Ethnology”

WEEK 4 – THE WORK OF CULTURE AND FORMATIONS OF GENDER AND SEX
Mon. 2/6    Ruth Benedict, selection from Patterns of Culture
Wed. 2/8    Margaret Mead, selection from Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies
            -> Essay One Assigned (21 points).
WEEK 5 – THE PSYCHOLOGY OF KINSHIP AND REPRODUCTION

Mon. 2/13  Sigmund Freud, selection from Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis

Wed. 2/15  Bronislaw Malinowski, selection from Sex and Repression in Savage Society

PART TWO - EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE / EMBODIED DIFFERENCES

WEEK 6 – WHERE DO IDEAS COME FROM?  DEBATES ON THE ORIGINS OF KNOWLEDGE

Mon. 2/20  Presidents Day Holiday

Wed. 2/22  Emile Durkheim, selection from The Elementary Forms of Religious Life
           Film: Salamanders (tentative)
           -> Essay One due.

WEEK 7 – LANGUAGE, PHYSICS AND PHYSIOLOGY

Mon. 2/27  Benjamin Lee Whorf, “The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behavior to Language”

Wed. 3/1  Marcel Mauss, “Techniques of the Body”

WEEK 8 – HUMAN EVOLUTION AND DIFFERENCE

Mon. 3/6  Clifford Geertz, “The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man”
           -> Essay Two Assigned (18 points)

Wed. 3/8  After Mankind: Science, Technology, Capital, and the Invention of Human Life

• Spring Break  3/13 - 3/17 •

PART THREE - CAPITALISM, COLONIALISM and GLOBAL CULTURAL ECONOMIES

WEEK 9 – IS HOMO ECONOMICUS?

Mon. 3/20  Adam Smith, selections from The Wealth of Nations
           Marcel Mauss, “The Gift”

           -> Essay Two due.
WEEK 10 – COLONIAL HISTORIES
Mon. 3/27 Karl Marx, “Wage Labor and Capital”
     Eric Wolf, “Introduction: Europe and the People Without History”


WEEK 11 – IMAGINING OTHERS
Mon. 4/3 Film: First Contact (58 mins.)

Wed. 4/5 Discussion of First Contact

WEEK 12 – FROM COLONIALISM TO GLOBALIZATION: CAPITALISM, CULTURE AND CONFLICT
Mon. 4/10 Marshall Sahlins, “Cosmologies of Capitalism”

Wed. 4/12 Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy”
     Aihwa Ong, “The Gender and Labor Politics of Postmodernity”

-> Essay Three assigned (21 points)

PART FOUR: REPRESENTING CULTURE

WEEK 13 – “SAVAGERY” IN THE AMAZON
Mon. 4/17 Film: Disappearing Worlds: The Kayapo (52 mins.)

Wed. 4/19 Terence Turner, “Representing, Resisting, Rethinking: Historical Transformations of Kayapo Culture and Consciousness”

WEEK 14 – TOURISM, ETHNOGRAPHY AND AUTHENTICITY
Mon. 4/24 Film: Incidents of Travel in Chichén Itzá, pt. 1

Wed. 4/26 Incidents of Travel in Chichén Itzá, pt. 2 and discussion
     Luis A. Vivanco, “Performative Pilgrims and the Shifting Grounds of Anthropological Documentary”

-> Essay Three due.

WEEK 15 – REPRESENTATION AND REALITY
Mon. 5/1 Tim Mitchell, “Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order”

-> Essay Four assigned (18 points)

-> Essay Four due Monday, May 8 before 3 pm.