

Professor Margot Weiss

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Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 12-1pm in Center for the Americas 206

Course Time: Tuesday and Thursday: 10:30-11:50, in Fisk 302

Course Description

This course will teach you both the foundations of cultural anthropology and how to start thinking like a cultural anthropologist. Cultural anthropology, although historically concerned with the study of non-western people, is today centrally focused on how people create and define distinct ways of living and how these ways of living interact over time and across space. *Culture*, then, is our key word, one we will approach historically, cross-culturally and analytically by asking: What is culture? Is it possible to understand a very different culture? What does culture have to do with race, with gender and sexuality, with family configurations, with religious beliefs? How might economic changes, globalization, war or imperialism change cultures, and vice-versa? What are the ethical issues entailed in studying people unlike – or like – ourselves?

To begin to think through these complex questions, the course is divided into 7 major themes: 1) Culture and Ethnography; 2) Social Evolution and the Idea of the “Primitive”; 3) Ritual, Belief and Social Performance; 4) Gender, Sexuality and the Body; 5) Race, Culture and Nation; 6) Local, Transnational and Global Exchange and 7) Ethics and Practice of Anthropology. These 7 themes represent topics that have animated cultural anthropology’s conversations from the formation of the field to today. Our readings will include some of cultural anthropology’s foundational thinkers, alongside brand-new approaches to these problematics – including essays written by the Anthropology faculty here at Wesleyan. With a reading list that emphasizes breadth as well as depth, you will learn to think ethnographically about culture and cultural difference, exploring these issues through ethnographic essays, two full-length ethnographies, as well as film and other media.

Course Texts

1. Don Kulick (1998), *Travesti: Sex, Gender, and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes*. Chicago: Chicago University Press. ISBN:9780226461007

2. Anne Allison (2006), *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*. Berkeley: University of California Press. ISBN:9780520245655

All books are available at the Bookstore and are also on reserve at the library. Articles are on Moodle.

Course Assignments

Attendance and Participation ----- 10%

Debate Project ----- 15%

Three Short Writing Assignments ----- 30% (total)

Midterm Exam ----- 20%

Final Take-Home Exam ----- 25%

Attendance and Participation

You may miss two classes without explanation or penalty. Unexcused absences after two will negatively impact your final grade. If you think you have a valid reason for missing class (emergency, health problem, etc), please contact your class dean/other relevant Wesleyan official and have that person contact me. Excused absences are **only** granted when a Wesleyan

official contacts me on your behalf (**not when you send me an email**).

You are expected to come to class on time and to contribute to class discussion in a positive, relevant and respectful way. If you like to take notes on your laptop, you may bring it to class; however, any use of your computer for non-class purposes will result in suspension of this privilege. I expect you to be active in discussion and to shape the course with your own interests.

Ethical Debate Day

Toward the end of the semester, you will participate in a group debate project. Working with a team of four or five, you will take one side of an ethical debate within contemporary anthropology (e.g.: female genital surgery, embedded anthropologists, IRB and fieldwork ethics). The project will entail reading the recommended readings provided and developing an argument; on **11/23** there will be an in-class debate. Your grade for this part of the class is based on your participation in the group, in combination with a group position paper and an individual assessment you will turn in on debate day.

Short Writing Assignments

You will turn in three short (2-3 page, double-spaced) essays throughout the semester, based on prompts. The first will focus on *ethnographic writing*; you will attend an event and write a “thick description” of that event. This first paper is due **9/23**. The second will be an *article review*: you will pick one article from a major cultural anthropology journal and review it, connecting it to our course readings. This paper is due **11/2**. Your final assignment is to write a short *personal essay* answering the question: Why study cultural anthropology/do ethnography? This final essay is due **12/9**, our last day of class.

The purpose of these essays is to give you a chance to try your hand at ethnographic writing and to explore ideas in cultural anthropology on your own terms. Although short, these essays should be concise and clear – avoid big generalizations and pontificating; instead, focus in on one point and explore that with as much detail as possible. Part of this assignment is to learn how to write a compelling essay in a limited space, so do not waste your time with extensive introductions or conclusions – just jump right in! Because these essays are more experimental than the exams, they will be graded on a check system: a check plus for truly outstanding work/effort, a check for good work/effort, and a check minus for poor work/effort. Your final grade for this portion of the course is based on your work on these assignments over the course of the semester.

Midterm and Final Exams

The midterm exam will be held in class on **10/21**. The exam will cover material up through the exam date, and will test you on how well you understand and can apply the concepts you have learned in the course. It will consist of short answer/conceptual definitions and short essays.

The final exam is a take-home essay exam, due **during exam week**. The final will cover material drawn from the course as a whole, with an emphasis on material from the second half of the course. There will be a choice of essays that ask you to compare and contrast, define, and analyze course material. You will have 24 hours to complete the exam. This is an open-book exam, but I expect your essay will be less polished than a regular paper: focus on the argument, not quotes. Like the midterm, grades will be based on how well you understand and can work with key course concepts. We will discuss the final in detail at the end of the semester.

Extra credit

For extra credit, you may do **up to two** of the following: 1) attend a lecture or other anthropology

event and write a 1-page analysis, connecting the lecture/event to our course readings (see me if you are unsure if the event is suitably anthropological); 2) read or watch the recommended readings and/or films and write a 1-page analysis, connecting this material to our course readings; and/or 3) submit a question for the midterm and/or final exam. For the midterm, the question should be answerable in two paragraphs; the final question can be longer. Along with your question, also hand in a very brief outline of the answer (with a list of citations and a thesis statement).

Class Policies

ALL PAPERS ARE DUE THE DAY LISTED IN THE SYLLABUS. Late papers will not be accepted. Seriously.

You are strongly encouraged to come to see me in office hours if there is any course material you do not understand, or if you need guidance on my expectations for papers, exams or any other aspect of this course.

Students with Disabilities:

It is the policy of Wesleyan University to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. Students, however, are responsible for registering with Disabilities Services, in addition to making requests known to me in a timely manner. If you require accommodations in this class, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, so that appropriate arrangements can be made. The procedures for registering with Disabilities Services can be found at: <http://www.wesleyan.edu/deans/disability-students.html>.

Honor Code:

All work must be done in compliance with the Honor Code, which prohibits:

- The attempt to give or obtain assistance in a formal academic exercise without due acknowledgement. This includes, but is not limited to: cheating during an exam; helping another student to cheat or to plagiarize; completing a project for someone and/or asking someone to complete a project for you.
- Plagiarism - the presentation of another person's words, ideas, images, data or research as one's own. Plagiarism is more than lifting a text word-for-word, even from sources in the public domain. Paraphrasing or using any content or terms coined by others without proper acknowledgement also constitutes plagiarism.
- The submission of the same work for academic credit more than once without permission.
- Willful falsification of data, information, or citations in any formal exercise.
- Deception concerning adherence to the conditions set by the instructor for a formal academic exercise.

For papers, please write and sign the following pledge:

In accordance with the Honor Code, I affirm that this work is my own and all content taken from other sources has been properly acknowledged.

For exams, please write and sign the following pledge:

In accordance with the Honor Code, I affirm that this work has been completed without improper assistance.

If you need help with proper citations or you have questions on how to avoid plagiarism, let me know or contact the Writing Workshop: <http://www.wesleyan.edu/writing/workshop/>

Course Schedule

Introduction: Culture and Ethnography

Tuesday, September 7

Introduction: What is Cultural Anthropology?

Thursday, September 9

Seeing like an Anthropologist: Cultural Relativism, Perspective, Ethnocentrism

*Horace Miner, 1956. "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema"

*Laura Bohannan, 1966. "Shakespeare in the Bush"

Tuesday, September 14

Ethnographic Method: Participant Observation and Cultural Comparison

*Bronislaw Malinowski, 1932. "The Subject, Method and Scope of this Enquiry" from *Argonauts*

*Anna Tsing, 1993. "Opening" *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen* (read for her method)

Recommended Film: Bronislaw Malinowski: Off the Verandah

Wednesday, September 15

Recommended Talk: Jean O'Brien (Native American Studies Lecture Series, CAAS @ 4:15)

Thursday, September 16

Representation: Interpretation and Ethnographic Writing

*Clifford Geertz, 1973. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture"

*Daniella **Gandolfo**, 2009. "First Diary," from *The City at its Limits* (read for her writing)

Recommended Reading: James Clifford, 1986. "Introduction: Partial Truths"

Social Evolution and the Idea of the "Primitive"

Tuesday, September 21

Social Evolution: Primitive Man, Race/Sex and Civilization

*Lewis Henry Morgan, 1877. "Ethnical Periods" from *Ancient Society*

*Lee Baker, 1998. "The Ascension of Anthropology as Social Darwinism"

Recommended Reading: George Stocking, 1982. "The Dark-Skinned Savage"

Thursday, September 23

Consuming the Other: Papua New Guinea Adventure Tourism

In-class Film: Cannibal Tours

Due: Essay 1

Tuesday, September 28

Politics of Knowledge: Debates on Hunting and Gathering Societies

*Sally Slocum, 1975. "Woman the Gatherer: Male Bias in Anthropology"

*Marshall Sahlins, 1972. "The Original Affluent Society"

Recommended Reading: Richard Lee, 2007. "The Ju/'Hoansi at the Crossroads"

Recommended Film: N!ai, The Story of a !Kung Woman

Ritual, Belief and Social Performance

Thursday, September 30

Belief and Worldview: Rationality

- *E. E. Evans-Pritchard, 1937. "Witchcraft Explains Unfortunate Events"
- *Susan Harding, 2000. "Speaking is Believing" in *The Book of Jerry Falwell*
- Recommended Film*: Sir E.E. Evans-Pritchard: Strange Beliefs

Tuesday, October 5

Social Drama, Symbolism and the Politics of Ritual

- *Victor Turner, 1967. "Betwixt and Between"
- *Saba Mahmood, 2001. "Rehearsed Spontaneity and the Conventionality of Ritual"
- Recommended Film*: The Poojari's Daughter
- Recommended Reading*: Gillian **Goslinga**, "On *Shakti*-filled bodies and divinities"

Gender, Sexuality, Body

Thursday, October 7

Gender and Embodiment: Brazilian Travestis

- *Don Kulick, *Travesti*, Introduction – Chapter 2

Monday, October 11

Recommended Talk: David Harvey, "Crises, Geographical Disruptions and the Future of Capitalism" (CHUM Lecture @ 4:15pm)

Tuesday, October 12

Gender, Sex, Sexuality and Subjectivity: Brazilian Travestis

- *Don Kulick, *Travesti*, Chapter 3 - Chapter 5

Thursday, October 14

Bodies, Kinship and Reproductive Technologies

- In-class film: Gillian **Goslinga**: "The Child The Stork Brought Home"
- *Gillian Goslinga, 2000. "Body Boundaries, Fiction of the Female Self"
- *Susan Martha Kahn, 2006. "Eggs and Wombs: The Origins of Jewishness"

Tuesday, October 19: No Class -- Fall Break

Thursday, October 21:

In-class Midterm Exam

Race, Culture, Nation

Tuesday, October 26

Race, Culture and State Institutions

- *Franz Boas, 1931. "Race and Progress" and "Modern Populations of America"
- *Karen Brodtkin, 1994. "How did Jews Become White Folk?"
- *Lee Baker, 2001. "The Color-Blind Bind"
- Recommended Reading*: Lee Baker, "Rethinking Race at the Turn of the Century" (on Boas)

Thursday, October 28

Agency and Power: Race, Class, Development

- *John Jackson, 2001. "White Harlem: Toward the Performative Limits of Blackness"
- *Gina **Ulysse**, 1999. "Uptown Ladies and Downtown Women: Class and Color in Jamaica"
- Recommended Reading*: Anu **Sharma**, 2008. "Staging Development: A Drama in North India"

Recommended Talk: Ned Blackhawk (Native American Studies Lecture Series, CAAS @ 4:15)

Monday, November 1

Recommended Talk: Kathleen Stewart, "A Life, a List, a Line" (CHUM Lecture @ 4:15pm)

Tuesday, November 2

Sovereignty and the Law: Hawaii

In-class lecture: Kēhaulani Kauanui

*Kēhaulani **Kauanui**, 2008. "Colonialism in Equality: Hawaiian Sovereignty and US Civil Rights"

Due: Essay 2

Local, Transnational and Global Exchange

Thursday, November 4

Exchange: Gift and Commodity

*Marcel Mauss, 1950. Excerpt from *The Gift*

*Charlie Piot, 1999. "Exchange: Hierarchies of Value in an Economy of Desire"

Recommended Reading: Diane Tober, 2001. "Semen as Gift, Semen as Goods"

Recommended Film: Ongka's Big Moka

Tuesday, November 9

Global Capitalism and Transnational Flows

*Arjun Appadurai, 1996. "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy"

*Caren Kaplan, 1995. "'World without Boundaries': Body Shop's Trans/National Geographics"

Recommended Reading: Karen Ho, 2005. "Situating Global Capitalisms"

Recommended Film: Trobriand Cricket: An Indigenous Response to Colonialism

Thursday, November 11

*Anne Allison (2006), *Millennial Monsters* (Ch 1, 3-4)

Tuesday, November 16

*Anne Allison (2006), *Millennial Monsters* (Ch 5 - Epilogue)

Ethics and Practice of Anthropology

Thursday, November 18

Ethics Debate

In-class Workshop on Debate

*Read for your topic

Recommended Talk: Lisa Brooks (Native American Studies Lecture Series, CAAS @ 4:15)

Tuesday, November 23

In-class Ethics Debate

Due: Debate Group Position Paper and Individual Assessment

Thursday, November 25: Thanksgiving

Tuesday, November 30

Anthropology in the Public Sphere: Queer Interventions

*Esther Newton, 2009. "My Date with Phil Donahue: A Queer Intellectual in TV-Land"

*Margot **Weiss**, 2009. "Rumsfeld!: Consensual BDSM & 'Sadomasochistic' Torture"

Thursday, December 2

Public Anthropology: Haiti

In-class lecture: Gina Ulysse

*Gina **Ulysse**, packet of media materials

Tuesday, December 7

The Trouble with Culture

*Lila Abu-Lughod, 1991. "Writing Against Culture"

*Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, 1992. "Beyond 'Culture'"

Recommended Reading: Kathleen Stewart, 2007. Excerpt of *Ordinary Affects*

Thursday, December 9

Course Wrap-up and Review

Due: Essay 3

Final exam due: Exam Week