

# INTRODUCTION TO CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Northeastern Illinois University

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What does it mean to be human? Anthropology is the study of humanity across space and time. It is divided into four fields: archaeology, and biological, cultural, and linguistic anthropology. It is the most interpretive science of all the social sciences, meaning that its methods are just as much scientific as they are relative and subjective. Cultural anthropology deals with everything about people living today, but focuses on commonalities and differences, in order to understand human beings as social creatures embedded in systems of race, class, and gender. Although the word “culture” has many definitions, most anthropologists agree that it represents the sum total of all the customs, practices, beliefs, languages, politics and economic activity of any given group of people. Culture is really everything we do.

Cultural anthropologists study immigrant politics in Ireland, women’s work in a village in Mexico, spiritual trances in a Brazilian church, global corporations headquartered in New York, gangs in Chicago, water rights in West Africa, and child-rearing in Chinese cities. The purpose is not simply to describe how people act, what they have in common, and what makes them different, but to account for *why*. This involves critical thinking to challenge, explore, change, and add to a series of concepts, principles, terms, and major theory dating back about 150 years. The methods involved are often as wide ranging as the places they choose, including surveys, mapping, interviews, participant-observation, and complex systems of recording facts. Researchers often involve themselves deeply among the people they study, becoming part of their households, communities, and organizations, paying close attention to the details of daily life and interactions, often in order to write long narratives called ‘ethnography.’

Our course will take a wide-ranging look at the major realms of study and approaches taken by cultural anthropologists, and allow students to put these to work exploring their world.

You are here to develop an understanding of human cultural diversity, and a cross-cultural perspective of subsistence practices, political and economic systems, marriage patterns and kinship, ritual and religion, and ethnicity. But you will also understand cultural relativism, the holistic approach, ethnography, and participant-observation through practice as well. Students will be evaluated on weekly responses and quizzes on the readings, and three papers involving your own ethnography and analysis. This course is writing intensive, and discussion intensive. You are here to engage.

## GOALS

- = Become fluent in the major terms and approaches in cultural anthropology.
- = Identify and analyze the relations between political economy and culture.
- = Achieve an understanding of the tensions in ethnocentrism and cultural relativism.
- = Find your anthropological voice in writing persuasive interpretations of human life.

## COURSE TEXTS

- = *Cultural Anthropology*, sixth edition, Barbara Miller
- = *Tenants Of East Harlem*, by Russell Leigh Sharman
- = additional articles and readings as assigned and posted on Blackboard

All readings are to be completed before class on the week scheduled for discussion. All weekly Reader Responses and Quizzes are based on ALL the readings for that week.

## REQUIREMENTS

- |                           |     |                 |         |
|---------------------------|-----|-----------------|---------|
| = Weekly Reader Responses | 20% | <u>Grading:</u> |         |
| = Weekly Quizzes          | 10% | = A             | 90-100% |
| = Discussant Session      | 10% | = B             | 80-89%  |

= Paper 1	20%	= C	70-79%
= Paper 2	20%	= D	60-69%
= Paper 3	20%	= F	< 60%

**Reader Responses:** Students will write a one-page response—at least 350 words or longer—to the readings for each week, except on weeks 5, 10, and 15, when papers are due. How do you interpret what the authors explained? What made the most sense to you? How do you agree or disagree? Do you see these same issues in your own life or the lives of people you know? Your response should reflect your own opinion and your own critical reasoning, but include at least 3 significant details from each of the materials assigned. Reader Responses are due to be posted to Blackboard by 6PM the day before class.

**Quizzes:** Each class begins with a quiz on the materials for that week. Students will be presented with 10 terms used in the readings, and must select 5 to define and explain using examples from the texts and from personal experience.

**Discussant Session:** Once in the semester each student will act as a discussant for the readings and subjects for that week. Students will lead discussion by preparing at least 5 questions, using quotes, offering criticisms, and referencing further sources. Hard copy of questions will be turned in and graded. Guidelines are provided on Blackboard.

**Papers:** Three times during the semester students will complete an essay. The paper should be printed, double-spaced, using a 12-point font and one-inch margins. For the first paper, you will write an Ethnographic Report after doing observations of a chosen situation or site. For the second paper, you will record and transcribe a normal conversation, or interview a person about their life history, and write a Discourse Analysis. For the final paper, you will research scholarly sources in anthropology, and choose between writing a family history according to shifts in culture and political economy, or an analysis of an ethnic group or social process described in the book, *Tenants of East Harlem*. Field notes and transcriptions are to be turned in along with each essay. Details on each paper will be handed out and discussed in class well ahead of the deadlines. Because this class is writing intensive, students are encouraged to take advantage of tutoring and writing assistance offered through the University.

## **POLICIES**

There will be no make-up exams for quizzes missed due to absence, except in verified cases of an illness or unforeseen emergency. In case of an anticipated absence due to emergency, students may take the quiz beforehand, by contacting the professor to make that arrangement.

Any Paper or Reader Response submitted late will be reduced by one letter grade, and submissions more than one week late will not be accepted, and result in an automatic F. Papers must consist of original work done specifically for this course during this semester. Cheating of any kind will result in a failing grade on all work for that week, a required meeting with the professor, and possible failure of the course. Plagiarism is considered cheating and any cases of plagiarism will be reported to the Dean of Students. While you are welcome to work with other students on your papers, and to quote and paraphrase scholarly work with the proper citations, all writing with your name on it must be your own words. If there is any confusion about how to cite, or the meaning of plagiarism, please feel free to talk to the professor outside of class.

Incompletes are discouraged. The Department of Anthropology strictly adheres to the University policy regarding the assignment of “Incomplete” instead of a grade at the end of the semester, and assignment of an “Incomplete” is actively discouraged. Please be sure all cell phones and wireless devices are turned off and not used during class sessions.

## **ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION**

You are expected to attend all class sections, and encouraged to take an active part in discussion. Strong and respectful participation in class may increase your grade by up to 5%. Your grade is automatically reduced after ANY unexcused absence, and low attendance can reduce your grade by up to 10%. Once again, you are here to engage. THERE WILL BE NO CLASS ON NOVEMBER 24<sup>TH</sup> DUE TO THE THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY.

## **SAFETY**

It is recognized that a safe university environment is a shared responsibility of faculty, staff, and students, all of whom are expected to familiarize themselves with and cooperate with emergency procedures. Web links to Campus Safety: Emergency Procedures and Safety Information can be found on NEIUpport on the MyNEIU tab or as follows:

[http://www.neiu.edu/~neiutemp/Emergency\\_Procedures/ElCentr](http://www.neiu.edu/~neiutemp/Emergency_Procedures/ElCentr)

CLASS

11:20AM	Announcements
	Quiz
@11:45AM	Lecture
	= Response Readings
	= Film/Speaker/Activity
@12:50PM	Break
1PM	Student Presentations & Group Discussion
2PM	End

**SCHEDULE**

**WEEK 1** August 25<sup>th</sup>  
**WHAT IS CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY?**

Read: = *Cultural Anthropology*, Chapter 1  
= "Body Ritual Among The Nacirema" by Horace Miner

**WEEK 2** September 1<sup>st</sup>  
**EVOLUTION AND CULTURE ORIGINS**

Read: = *Cultural Anthropology*, Chapter 2  
= "Ancient Genes And Modern Health" by S. Boyd Eaton & Melvin Konner  
= "Society And Sex Roles" by Ernestine Friedl

**WEEK 3** September 8<sup>th</sup>  
**FIELDWORK AND PARTICIPANT-OBSERVATION**

Read: = *Cultural Anthropology*, Chapter 3  
= "Life In Big Red," by Dwight Conquergood

**WEEK 4** September 15<sup>th</sup>  
**POLITICAL ECONOMY AND CULTURE**

Read: = *Cultural Anthropology*, Chapter 4  
= *Tenants Of East Harlem*, Chapter 8

**WEEK 5** September 22<sup>nd</sup>  
**CONSUMPTION AND EXCHANGE**

Read: = *Cultural Anthropology*, Chapter 5  
= *Tenants Of East Harlem*, Chapter 6  
Due: Paper 1—Ethnographic Report, in hard copy. No Weekly Reader Response due.

**WEEK 6** September 29<sup>th</sup>  
**LANGUAGE AND DISCOURSE**

Read: = *Cultural Anthropology*, Chapter 11  
= "A Cultural Approach To Male/Female Communication" by Maltz & Borker  
= "'To Give Up On Words': Silence In Western Apache Culture," Keith Basso

**WEEK 7** October 6<sup>th</sup>  
**RACE AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION**

Read: = *Cultural Anthropology*, Chapter 9

**WEEK 8**

**13<sup>th</sup>**

**PARADOXES OF RACE**

**October**

- Read: = "Neither White Nor Black: The Representation Of Racial Identity Among Puerto Ricans On The Island And In The US Mainland" by Jorge Duany  
= "White Privilege: Unpacking The Invisible Knapsack" by Peggy McIntosh  
= "Suite For Ebony And Phonics" by John R. Rickford

**WEEK 9**

**GENDER AND INEQUALITY**

**October 20<sup>th</sup>**

- Read: = Cultural Anthropology, Chapter 6  
= "The Girls Next Door" by Pete Landeman

**WEEK 10**

**27<sup>th</sup>**

**GENDER AND KINSHIP**

**October**

- Read: = Cultural Anthropology, Chapter 8  
= "Women's Weaving Cooperatives In Oaxaca" by Lynn Stephen  
Due: Paper 2—Discourse Analysis, in hard copy.  
No Weekly Reader Response due.

**WEEK 11**

**3<sup>rd</sup>**

**POLITICS AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION**

**November**

- Read: = Cultural Anthropology, Chapter 10  
= Tenants Of East Harlem, Chapter 3

**WEEK 12**

**10<sup>th</sup>**

**MIGRATION AND GLOBALIZATION**

**November**

- Read: = Cultural Anthropology, Chapter 14  
= "The Churn: Creative Destruction In A Border Town" by Katherine Boo

**WEEK 13**

**17<sup>th</sup>**

**THE BODY AND HEALING**

**November**

- Read: = Cultural Anthropology, Chapter 7  
= "Sacred Healing And Biomedicine Compared" by Kaja Finkler

[THERE WILL BE NO CLASS ON NOVEMBER 24<sup>TH</sup> DUE TO THE HOLIDAY.]

**WEEK 14**

**1<sup>st</sup>**

**RELIGION AND THE SACRED**

**December**

- Read: = Cultural Anthropology, Chapter 12  
= "Mother Cow" by Marvin Harris, from *Cows, Pigs, Wars And Witches*

**WEEK 15**

**8<sup>th</sup>**

**MEANING AND POWER IN CULTURE**

**December**

- Read: = Cultural Anthropology, Chapter 13  
= "Women, Minorities, And Indigenous Peoples: Universalism And Cultural Relativity" by Carole Nadengast

## COURSE REFERENCES

- Basso, Keith H. 1999. "'To Give up on Words': Silence in Western Apache Culture." In Podolefsky, Aaron & Peter J. Brown, eds., *Applying Cultural Anthropology: An Introductory Reader*, fourth edition. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company.
- Boo, Katherine. 2004. "The Churn: Creative Destruction in a Border Town." *The New Yorker*, March 29.
- Conquergood, Dwight. 1992. "Life in Big Red: Struggles and Accommodations in a Chicago Polyethnic Tenement." In Lamphere, Louise, ed., *Structuring Diversity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Duany, Jorge. 2003. "Neither White nor Black: The Representation of Racial Identity Among Puerto Ricans on the Island and in the U.S. Mainland." Manuscript. Río Piedras: University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras.
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- Rickford, John R. 1999. "Suite for Ebony and Phonics." In Podolefsky, Aaron & Peter J. Brown, eds., *Applying Cultural Anthropology: An Introductory Reader*, fourth edition. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company.
- Sharman, Russell Leight. 2006. *The Tenants of East Harlem*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Stephen, Lynn. "Women's Weaving Cooperatives in Oaxaca: An Indigenous Response to Neoliberalism." *Critique of Anthropology*, 25:3, pp. 253-78.