

Anthropology 324D

Anthropological Theory

Fall 2008

Professor Doug Smith

Office: HSS 214

Phone: (503) 838-8372

Email: smithw@wou.edu

Office hours: TR 9-10; W 1-3

Course Description

This course, required for Anthropology majors, surveys key theoretical paradigms in anthropology. We begin with the advent of the discipline in the nineteenth century and look at how anthropology's examination of "primitive" societies contributed to Victorian evolutionary thinking. We then enter the twentieth century and move to essential theoretical developments in modern anthropology: the concept of culture and cultural relativism; functionalism; the significance of symbolism in culture; the significance of the environment; the formative power of political and economic systems over local cultures and societies; feminism; and globalization. We will be concerned with how twentieth century anthropologists have applied theory to data gathered via ethnographic fieldwork to reconceptualize culture, society, and social change. By focusing on the shifting of theoretical approaches in anthropology up to the present, we see the ways in which theory has undergone transformation according to historical circumstances and influential anthropologists. We also see continuity in regard to anthropology's abiding concerns: human diversity and human universals, the relationship between culture and worldview, the relationship between individual and society, and social change.

Objectives

Reading assignments will correlate significant theories with the writings of significant anthropologists representative of those theories. Through readings, lectures, and films, students should be able to engage the following questions:

- What is culture?
- How does one weigh the relative importance of the symbolic and material aspects of culture?
- How do we account for culture and social change?
- How should we deal with the relationship between individual and collective, person and society, structure and agency?
- How can anthropological theory help us deal with questions of personal and social identity?
- Why is anthropology an important discipline? How should it operate in the world; what should be its role in world affairs?
- How can social theory help us understand critical, real-world issues, such as poverty, social inequalities, and environmental problems?

Course Requirements

Readings

There are two texts students must acquire from the university bookstore or otherwise:

Moore, Jerry D.

2004 *Visions of Culture*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Comaroff, Jean

1985 *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

All other readings for the course are accessible either from e-reserves on the Hamersly Library website, the JSTOR database, or some other website. You can reach JSTOR from the “Journal Articles and Databases” link on the library’s homepage.

Reading Notes

I cannot stress enough the importance of embodying your responses to readings in notes in some form—whether they take the form of writing notes in the margins of readings or keeping a separate notebook. Reading notes serve the following purposes: 1) they will enhance your engagement with the reading; 2) they will prepare you for discussion contributions; 3) they will help you prepare for papers and the final exam.

Read Strategically

1. When you sit down to read, consider the author and his or her personal and intellectual contexts: who is this person? When was this thing written? How does that historical positioning influence theory and analysis?
2. What central or governing question is this author seeking to answer? What does this piece boil down to? **Be able to state that question or problem in one sentence.**
3. What are the concepts a reader must grasp in order to grasp the writer’s argument? That is, what concepts belong to his or her theory?
4. How does the author use data to solidify the argument? How does theory guide interpretation of data?
5. Does the writer’s argument—does his or theory—have weaknesses? What other theories might one use to deal with this material?

For every class meeting, you will prepare from your reading notes, *in typed form*, three *substantive* comments and/or questions that you consider worthy of consideration. During the first five minutes of the discussion period of a given class meeting, we might circulate notes to get a sense of what's on our minds. I will collect these and keep a record of this aspect of your class participation.

How to Do Well in Anthropology 324D

To succeed in this class, attendance is critical, and you must be consistent in completing readings, absorbing lectures, viewing films, and taking thorough notes. I do not log attendance, but even infrequent absences *are noticed*—not only by me but by the rest of the seminar participants. If you must be absent on a particular class meeting, you should notify me in advance.

Lectures

Lectures will seek to reinforce your attention to major concepts in the readings, and they will frequently introduce external, supplementary material. Since you will be responsible for both reading and lecture material, it will pay to come to class and take solid notes.

Videos

Films, too, will reinforce, complement, and add material to readings. The films, therefore, will form an essential part of the learning experience in this course. If absent during a class screening, be sure to see the film at some other time. You should take notes on films and be prepared to draw on them for discussion in class and when you study for the final exam.

Participation

Doing the reading, heeding the lectures, and paying due attention to films are all part of participation in the course, and they lay the foundation for participation in discussion. Your reading notes, again, are designed to help give you something to say in discussion. All forms of participation here mentioned are important enough that 20% of your grade will rest on the qualities of your commitment. Please feel free to speak with me about any concerns you have about participation, or about how I've been keeping track of this dimension of your course grade over the term.

Papers

Thinking and writing are mutually reinforcing. The objective of paper writing is to help you think through the assigned ethnographic readings and record your carefully considered response to them. You will submit three short papers over the course of the term. These should be four-to-five typed pages long, double-spaced, in 11- or 12-point.

For the first paper, you will choose to analyze material from one of the first four weeks of the course. This paper should *principally* address the **ethnographic reading** for the week, not the background reading (if there is one) on a certain theoretical paradigm. There is no need to tell me in advance which week you have chosen.

Format for Paper 1

The paper should contain answers to the following questions:

1. What is the main theoretical framework advanced in this work?
2. What concepts central to that framework (e.g. "survivals" in evolutionism or equilibrium in functionalism) does the author emphasize in his or her analysis of the ethnographic material?
3. How does the author link data and theory? That is, what elements in the ethnographic material itself are brought forth to support the author's theoretical argument?
4. Does the author provide a convincing account? Are other interpretations possible?

The second paper will address Comaroff's book *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance*, and the third will allow you to apply a theoretical approach of your choosing to a problem of your choosing. Handouts detailing these assignments will be distributed at the appropriate moments.

For all papers, late submissions will suffer a half-grade penalty for each day late.

Final Exam

There will be an in-class final exam on the date designated for this class on the Finals Week schedule. Complete information forthcoming.

Grade Calculation

Papers	60%
Participation.....	20%
Final Exam.....	20%

Note on Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty consists of representing the work of others as your own and/or using notes or other aids during an examination. Students who engage in such actions will receive no credit for the assignment or examination in question and will be subject to University discipline as outlined in the Code of Student Responsibility. If you have further questions, please consult the Social Science Division policy on academic dishonesty and the Code of Student Responsibility.

Note on Disabilities

Any student who feels that she or he may need an accommodation for any type of disability should make an appointment at the Office of Disability Services, Phone: (503) 838-8250 V/TTY, Fax: (503) 838-8721, E-Mail: ods@wou.edu.)

Course Schedule (subject to some change)

Part 1: Early Anthropology in Context: High Imperialism to the Critique of Imperialism

Week 1 19th Century Evolutionism

9/30 Intro to the Course: What is Theory?

10/2 Reading: Moore, chapters 1 and 2; Morgan, "Ethnical Periods" **Access by Googling article title, or here: <http://www.mrs.umn.edu/academic/anthropology/chollett/anth1111/CourseReadings/Ethnical%20Periods.pdf>**

Lecture: "Edward B. Tylor's Unilineal Evolution"

Activity: How to Lead Discussions

Week 2 *Boas and His Legacy*

10/7 Reading: Moore, chapters 3, 5, and 6; Ruth Benedict, "Configurations of Culture in North America" **JSTOR**

10/9 Reading: Moore, chapter 8; Lewis, "Culture of Poverty" **e-reserve**

Film: "Margaret Mead and Samoa"

Week 3 *British Social Anthropology*

10/14 Reading: Moore, chapters 10, 11; Radcliffe-Brown, "Religion and Society" **JSTOR**

10/16 Reading: Moore, chapter 12; Gluckman, "Rituals of Rebellion" **e-reserve**

Film: "E.E. Evans-Pritchard: Strange Beliefs"

Week 4 *Materialism in Anthropology*

10/21 Reading: Moore, chapters 14, 15; Rappaport, "Ritual Regulation of Environmental Regulations among a New Guinea People" **JSTOR**

Lecture: Steward and Murphy's "Tappers and Trappers"

10/23 Reading: Moore, chapter 16; Carney, "Converting the Wetlands, 'Engendering the Environment...'" **JSTOR**

•Due no later than Friday 10/24 by 5:00 p.m.: Paper 1

Week 5 *Symbolic Anthropology*

10/28 Reading: Moore, chapters 18,19; Geertz: "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." **Accessible at: <http://www.si.umich.edu/~rfrost/courses/MatCult/content/Geertz.pdf>**

10/30 Reading: Moore, chapter 20; Burkhart, "Purity and Pollution" **e-reserve**

Part 2: The Big Picture: Local Communities in Global Political and Economic History

Week 6 *Political Economy and Practice Theory*

11/4 Reading: Ortner, "Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties" **JSTOR** Note: you may skip sections on structuralism and Marxism (pp. 135-141); Moore, chapter 24

Film: Selections from *The Wire*

11/6 Reading: Comaroff, Introduction

Film: Further selections from *The Wire*

Week 7 *The Anthropology of Events, Structure, and Cultural Practice*

11/11 Reading: Comaroff, chapters 2 and 3

Lecture: "Marvin Harris on the European Witch Craze"

11/13 Reading: Comaroff, chapter 4

Week 8 *Consciousness in History*

11/18 Reading: Comaroff, chapter 5

Lecture: "The Concept of Power in Foucault and Gramsci"

11/20 Reading: Comaroff, chapter 6

• **Due 11/21: Paper 2**

Week 9 *"Tradition" as Historical Practice*

11/25 Reading: Comaroff, chapter 7

Film: Holy Ghost People

11/27 No class: Thanksgiving (But read Comaroff's Conclusion!)

Week 10 *The Challenges of Globalization and Transnationalism*

12/2 Reading: Tsing. "The Global Situation"

Lecture: "Binationality and Mexican Migration"

12/4 Review for Final

• **Due 12/5: Paper 3**