

CULT 860: Critical Ethnography (Fall 2019)

Wednesday, 7:20—10 PM, Research Hall 201

Prof. Roger Lancaster

Office Hours: Wed, 4—7 PM, 3rd Floor Enterprise Hall

Ethnography—literally, ‘writing about (a) people (or culture)’—is a powerful method for examining social practices in specific settings. And because it asks after what people actually do and think (as opposed to what they would do or think if they acted according to an abstract theoretical paradigm), it also provides a means for both testing and developing theories of culture. Long associated with cultural anthropology (and qualitative sociology), ethnographic methods are taken up today by cultural studies practitioners in many fields (including English, folklore, history, etc.).

This course will survey classical and contemporary ethnographies, laying out the basic methodology of participant-observation fieldwork while asking key questions about the ethnographic product and how the technique has changed over a hundred years. How have ethnographic techniques served contradictory aims: colonial snooping or spying on the one side and liberationist aspirations on the other? What procedures might distinguish *critical* ethnographic practices from their power-serving alternatives? How do successful ethnographies coax insights from empirical detail? How do they connect the ‘micro’ setting to the ‘macro’ system? Lastly, how have critical ethnographies grappled with varied forms of social inequality (gender, sexuality, race, class) and what insights have they gleaned from people’s everyday practices? (Anthropology is emphasized, and rightly so: The discipline is uniquely identified with ethnographic techniques.)

APPARATUS: Readings listed are the minimal per week, which everyone will read. Each week, students will bring to class a short list of points to be discussed and will actively participate in seminar conversations, with each student coordinating for one book. In addition, students will write professional-grade, standard-format 600-1000-word book reviews for *three* books (to be read in their entirety, due Friday 5 PM via email on the week the book was read). Finally, students will complete a short (3,000-word, roughly five single-spaced pages) ethnographic exercise in some approved social field of her choosing. Final projects are due Saturday, 7 December, 5 PM.

(BOOK REVIEWS: See these simple instructions on book reviews:

<https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2015/03/27/essay-writing-academic-book-reviews.>)

EVALUATIONS: Grading will be weighted as follows:

Class Presentations/Participation: One third

Book Reviews: One third (roughly ten percent each)

Ethnographic Essay: One third (due Saturday, 7 December, 5 PM)

BOOKS:

Jessica Bruder, *Nomadland* OR Marc Augé, *No Fixed Abode*

Jason de Leon, *The Land of Open Graves*

Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think* OR Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*

Siegfried Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses*

Jack London, *People of the Abyss*
 Roger Lancaster, *Life is Hard*
 Jeffrey Lane, *The Digital Street*
 Juan José Martínez D'Aubuisson, *A Year Inside MS-13*
 Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa*
 Hortense Powdermaker, *After Freedom*
 Scheper-Hughes, *Death Without Weeping*
 Carol Stack, *All Our Kin*

WEEK 0 (8/28): Welcome & Introductions

- Bronislaw Malinowski, "Subject, Method, and Scope" from *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*

WEEK 1 (9/4): Peering into the Pit (1903)

- Jack London, *People of the Abyss*, with a foreword by Micaela di Leonardo. Read di Leonardo's introduction, preface, and book

WEEK 2 (9/11): The Ethnographic Veto (1928)

- Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa*

WEEK 3 (9/18): A Frankfurt School Study of the Emergent White-Collar Class (1930)

- Siegfried Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses* (entire book)

Pitch and brainstorm your preliminary ideas for an ethnographic project.

WEEK 4 (9/25): Race/Class in Indianola, Mississippi (1939)

- Hortense Powdermaker, *After Freedom*, Introduction and Parts 1, 2, 3 and 6.

WEEK 5 (10/2): Reinventing, Radicalizing, Decolonizing Anthropology (1969—1973)

- Vine Deloria, "Anthropologists and Other Friends," from *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1969)
- Joseph Jorgensen and Eric Wolf, "Anthropology on the Warpath" (1970)
- Gerald Berreman, "Bringing It All Back Home," from *Reinventing Anthropology* (1972)
- Laura Nader, "Up the Anthropologist," from *Reinventing Anthropology* (1972)
- Talal Asad, "Introduction," *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (1973)

Submit brief proposal for your ethnographic project. Attend to your subject, method, and scope: 300 words.

WEEK 6 (10/9): Culture of Poverty or Culture of Poor People? (1974)

- Carol Stack, *All Our Kin* (Entire book)

WEEK 7 (10/16): Dialogy, the 'Writerly' Moment, and Its Others (1980-90s)

- Eric Wolf, “Introduction” from *Europe and the People Without History* (1982)
- Johannes Fabian, from *Time and the Other* (1983)
- James Clifford, “On Ethnographic Authority” (1983) and “On Ethnographic Allegory” (1986)
- Trihn T. Minh-ha, “The Language of Nativism,” from *Native, Woman, Other* (1989)
- Fay Harrison, from *Decolonizing Anthropology* (1991)

WEEK 8 (10/23): Dialogy & Political Economy: Critical Ethnographic Solidarity (1992)

- Roger Lancaster, *Life is Hard*

WEEK 9 (10/30): Towards a Womanist Ethnographic Practice (1992)

- Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Death Without Weeping*; read Introduction and Chapters 1, 5, 6, 8, 10

WEEK 10 (11/6): Thinking Like A Forest (2008)

- Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think*, Introduction, chapters 1—4, Epilogue.

OR, alternative reading:

- Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*

WEEK 11 (11/13): Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail (2015)

- Jason de Leon, *The Land of Open Graves*

WEEK 12 (11/20): Surviving America in the Twenty-First Century (2017)

- Jessica Bruder, *Nomadland*

Or, alternative reading:

- Marc Augé, *No Fixed Abode*

WEEK 13 (11/27): Hanging Out on the Internet (2018)

- Jeffrey Lane, *The Digital Street*

WEEK 14 (11/04): See, Hear, and Shut Up (2018)

- Juan José Martínez D'Aubuisson, *A Year Inside MS-13* (entire book)

Final projects are due Saturday, 7 December, 5 PM.