

Anthropology 366  
The Anthropology of Class and Culture  
Nancy Abelmann  
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Tuesday, Davenport 209A  
11:30-2:30  
Office Hours (389 Davenport): Tuesday 2:30-4:30

### **Greetings!**

It has been a while since I have taught a 300 (or 400) level course in anthropology; furthermore, it has been some time since I have taught at all! And to boot, this semester finds me with a newborn (Isaac); but bear with me: I am really looking forward to teaching this course and to making it meaningful for all of you.

### Reaching me

Email (see above) and office hours are best; I check email most every weekday. I am, outside of office hours, almost never in my office. Should you need to reach me by phone, my home phone is your best bet (Monday - Friday, 9-5): 328-5763.

### Required Books

*To be read in full*

(listed in reading order)

Rubin, Lillian Breslow. 1976. Worlds of Pain: Life in the Working-Class Family. NY: Basic Books.

Willis, Paul. 1977. Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids get Working Class Jobs. NY: Columbia University Press.

Frykman, Jonas and Orvar Löfgren. [1979]1987. Culture Builders: A Historical Anthropology of Middle-Class Life. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Dillard, Annie. 1987. An American Childhood. NY: Harper & Row.

Heath, Shirley Brice. 1983. Ways With Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms. NY: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. Distinction. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. Selections.

Steedman, Carolyn Kay. 1986. Landscape for a Good Woman. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Balsham, Martha. 1993. Cancer in the Community: Class and Medical Authority. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Reay, Diane. 1998. Class Work: Mother's Involvement in their Children's Primary Schooling. Bristol, PA: UCL Press.

Hartigan, John Jr. 1999. Racial Situations: Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Gewertz, Deborah B. and Frederick K. Errington. 1999. Emerging Class in Papua New Guinea: The Telling of Difference. NY: Cambridge University Press.

Rodriguez, Richard. 1982. Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez. NY: Bantam Books.

*To be read in part*

Joyce, Patrick, ed. 1995. Class. NY: Oxford University Press.

Hall, John R., ed. Reworking Class. 1997. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Readings are available at the Undergraduate Library for overnight reserve and for purchase at the Illini Union Book Store etc.

\*See end of syllabus for a list of articles on reserve in the Anthropology Reading Room (hours will be announced)

### On The Readings

This course is primarily centered on ethnographic monographs. By that I mean that most of the weeks (10 out of 14 to be exact) we will be reading books (mostly in their entirety) that are the result of sustained anthropological field research. Each work, and each in its own way, is struggling with the construct of class. In turn, in their struggles with class each work also inevitably treats the construct of culture in one way or another -- and a number of the works argue that the treatment of class requires the consideration of other constructs as well (chief among them, gender and race). I use the word "construct" above to underscore that class (and culture, as well as race and gender) are ideas (not things) that are necessarily (if not explicitly) theorized; that is to say that they are employed with a whole host of assumptions and in dialogue with a range of already existing ideas/theories. Ethnography remains, for the most part, quite committed to grappling with the social (lived) world; as such, anthropologists engage theoretical constructs and debates as they try to make sense of the world at large and the world-at-small that they find in their field sites. I have arranged this course's books in -- I have never tried this before -- chronological order (according to the publication date). My rationale here is that in this way we can follow the anthropological (and sociological) discussions around class for over a quarter century. Although each work does not necessarily engage the particular books that fall before it on this syllabus, my hope is that collectively we will create a conversation among these books; in so doing, you will of course be reaching positions on the kind of approach to class (and culture) that you find most appealing (defensible). It is important to note here that the constructs germane to this course are not ones that we will be taking up in abstraction but rather in relation to the lived worlds that ethnography seeks to follow (in field work) and to represent/portray (in writing); as such these constructs live in ethnographic work and representation. So, we will be considering the application of these constructs in the anthropological process. Let me also note here that I do NOT have a road map for the chronological journey that we will take through these works; and as a matter of fact four of them are entirely new to me (and others still I have not read in years). And, furthermore, I firmly believe that these works will take on particular meaning both because of the order we read them in (as such they are inserted in an ongoing conversation) and because of YOU (namely, the specificity of the group that reads and discusses them).

The remaining four weeks are devoted to: (1) memoirs that (implicitly) theorize and portray class (and culture, race, and gender); and (2) theoretical articles. I teach another course

(Personal Anthropology) in which we read memoirs in relation to anthropology: two of my favorites from that course (and actually many more) are fascinating for their portrayal of class. One of the reasons that I enjoy teaching memoirs (great ones, that is) is because they are so much fun to read. Actually, though, having written this, I will warn you that the two I have chosen for this class -- Annie Dillard's An American Childhood and Richard Rodriguez's Hunger for Memory -- have engendered very strong reactions in semesters past (I'll fill you in after you have read them!). Interestingly, Dillard and Rodriguez are pretty much the same age and both writing about/in the United States. My hope of course is that these works will make for interesting intersection with the ethnographic works.

Two of the weeks are devoted to theoretical articles to be chosen from Joyce Patrick's ed. Class, John Hall's ed. Reworking Class, or from a selection of articles listed at the end of this syllabus. I have not decided which of these chapters/articles we will read; I have purposely left this open so that all of you can have a hand in directing the readings. My hunch is that questions and issues will arise as we read the books that will direct us to these readings; for the moment, however, you might begin to browse among them and consider pieces that you would like to read/discuss for one or another reason. The loose articles (i.e., not in a book) are available for your inspection in the Anthropology Reading Room (hours will be announced). In the case of the loose articles, we will talk about their distribution as the need arises (I have just recently learned about electronic distribution via the undergraduate library).

### The Writings

(for details see below)

8 WebBoard "Posts" (x 7) (due by 9 p.m. on Monday before class)

56% of grade

1 paper (graduate students, 6-8 pages) due February 26 (in class)

15 % of grade

Final paper due Friday May 3 (in my Anthropology Department mail box)

20% of grade

Class attendance and participation

9 % of grade

### ***Posts***

No doubt many of you are familiar with asynchronous posting for classes. Let me in brief introduce my sense of this writing/activity. A post is your reading response. It is not a summary of the reading at hand (after all we will have all done the same reading). It is a chance for you to respond to some of the issues in the work/s that interest, intrigue, awe, baffle, or trouble you most. As the semester progresses and we have done more and more reading together, it is likely that your response to any single reading will be made in relation to other previous readings and/or classroom discussions (I will value your efforts to make such connections, i.e., to read cumulatively). You are not only responsible for writing posts, but also for reading the posts of your classmates. I promise you (if experience serves me) that the collective (collected) posts will be fascinating and the best resource for writing the required papers (and more importantly for learning generally). Posts will typically be 1-2 (double spaced) pages long (on the order of 3-4 paragraphs). Although they are not formal papers, I still expect them to: (1) make points, (2) substantiate those points (i.e., with evidence from the readings), and (3) be well written and organized. None of this, however, is to say that they should not be personal; to the contrary some of you will likely have strong personal (affective) responses to these works and sharing those responses is what will make this class most interesting.

Additional Note #1: 1 of your posts should be about a memoir and another about a selection of theoretical articles; the remaining 6 will address the books.

Additional Note #2: 1 of your posts (and if you would like as many as 3) should be done jointly with a classmate; you can do this in any format you would like (e.g., an on-line discussion or a report on an off-line conversation).

Posts will be graded as follows: 1 = inadequate; 2= adequate; 3 = distinguished; 3+ = extraordinary. I will not return the posts; you can check on your "grades" (I hesitate to call them that) in person or by email.

### ***Paper #1***

4-6 pages

By February 26 you will have read five ethnographic works (one of them historical, Culture Builders) (for the purposes of this assignment, the memoir, An American Childhood, is not included). In this paper please consider 2 of the works in relation to each other. Needless to say there could be many ways of doing this, but certainly your paper should consider the similarities and differences in the authors' approaches to class and culture (and related constructs). Your paper should not offer a comparison of the empirical realities reviewed in the works (i.e., between students in rural America (from Heath's Ways with Words) and students in England (from Willis's Learning to Labor)) but rather between their ideas, arguments, and approaches. I will schedule appointments with all of you for February 12 and February 19 (I will likely end class a bit early those days) to discuss this paper and the class more generally.

(Note for **graduate students**: I will expect you to have consulted and refer to 2 or more articles (from the edited volumes or the loose pieces) in writing this paper. Also, your paper might be longer -- but no longer than 10 pages please).

### ***Paper #2***

I will schedule appointments with all of you for April 23 and April 30 (I will likely end class a bit early those days) to discuss this paper.

### ***Undergraduates***

8-10 pages

You may choose either of the following options:

A field work proposal that somehow illuminates our understanding of the workings of class. You will: (1) describe the proposed research -- where and how it will be undertaken; (2) offer a rationale for this proposed research -- what you hope to learn from it and what it will contribute to our understanding of the world; (3) expand upon that rationale to consider how it will contribute to the anthropological understanding of class and other related constructs; and (4) describe your understanding of the key ideas/constructs/hypotheses that underscore your proposed research (not necessarily in the order outlined here). Your proposal should refer to at least 4 of the books we have read and at least 2 of the articles.

A sustained discussion of at least 4 of the ethnographic monographs we have read in relation to one another. The comments above under Paper #1 apply here; also, you may build upon your first paper for this assignment. In the preparation for and writing of this paper you should consult at least 2 articles.

### ***Graduates***

10-20 pages

You may choose either of the following options:

An essay in which you consider your proposed (or ongoing) dissertation research in relation to the readings and discussions of the semester. You may organize this in any way, but you will likely consider theoretical, methodological, and expository (representational) questions. You are not of course required to refer to all of the readings of the semester, but I hope that you will refer to many of them as you stake out your various positions. My hope is that this assignment will allow you to refine your thinking on your proposed or current research and that it will facilitate your ongoing or future proposal writing. Of course, questions surrounding class should be featured prominently in this paper.

See undergraduate option B above. Refer, however, both to more books and theoretical articles.

**\*Citation format:** As Jones notes, "XYZ" (1997:15). Please do include a bibliography of references cited in your paper. I also encourage you to cite your classmates -- either their comments in class or their WebBoard writings: As John Smith suggests XYZ (WebBoard: February 1). You may also cite personal communication with a classmate: As John Smith notes, XYZ (personal communication). I encourage you to work with your classmates on the writing assignments and to refer to your classmates' words and ideas in your writing.

### **Class attendance and participation**

This class will succeed or fail depending on you: your level of engagement with the readings, and with your classmates. It is critical that you attend every class -- otherwise you will be out of the conversation that is the class. I urge you to keep up your attendance (and reading). All participation is welcome; clearly all of us bring different levels of familiarity/experience to the class, but I am not interested in comparing you with your classmates. It is your active and forthright participation that I will value

### In Class

This class is scheduled to meet for three hours! That is long; very few of us (and certainly not me) can sustain attention for that long. I envision -- but we will see -- that I will begin class by reviewing your posts, mapping out the constellation of responses, opinions, queries etc. Thereafter I hope to combine open (but focused) discussion and small group work (in some cases on the same question, in other cases on different questions). I also imagine that we will take a 15+ minute break circa 1 p.m. for, among other things, lunch; those of you who need to snack earlier may do so during class (unless your classmates find this annoying). Also, I do not intend to continue each class the full 3 hours; we will see how things are going and whether we have, for that day, depleted our energy and resources.

### Schedule

Tuesday, January 15 INTRO

Tuesday, January 22 **Ethnography Post #1**

Rubin, Lillian Breslow. 1976. Worlds of Pain: Life in the Working-Class Family. NY: Basic Books.

Tuesday, January 19 **Ethnography Post #2**

Willis, Paul. 1977. Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids get Working Class Jobs. NY: Columbia University Press.

Tuesday, February 5 **Ethnography Post #3**

Frykman, Jonas and Orvar Löfgren. [1979]1987. Culture Builders: A Historical Anthropology of Middle-Class Life. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Tuesday, February 12 **Memoir Post #1**

Memoir I

Dillard, Annie. 1987. An American Childhood. NY: Harper & Row.

**Individual meetings**

Tuesday, February 19 **Ethnography Post #4**

Heath, Shirley Brice. 1983. Ways With Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms. NY: Cambridge University Press.

**Individual meetings**

Tuesday, February 26 **Article Post #1**

Selected articles

Tuesday, March 5 **Ethnography Post #5**

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. Distinction. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. Selections

Tuesday, March 12 **Ethnography Post #6**

Steedman, Carolyn Kay. 1986. Landscape for a Good Woman. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

**Spring Break!!!**

Tuesday, March 26 **Article Post #2**

Selected articles

Tuesday, April 2 **Ethnography Post #7**

Balsham, Martha. 1993. Cancer in the Community: Class and Medical Authority.

Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Tuesday, April 9 **Ethnography Post #8**

Reay, Diane. 1998. Class Work: Mother's Involvement in their Children's Primary Schooling. Bristol, PA: UCL Press.

Tuesday, April 16 **Ethnography Post #9**

Hartigan, John Jr. 1999. Racial Situations: Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Tuesday, April 23 **Ethnography Post #10**

Gewertz, Deborah B. and Frederick K. Errington. 1999. Emerging Class in Papua New Guinea: The Telling of Difference. NY: Cambridge University Press.

**Individual meetings**

Tuesday, April 30 **Memoir Post #2**

Memoir II

Rodriguez, Richard. 1982. Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez. NY: Bantam Books.

**Individual meetings**

Articles on Reserve

*Narrative*

Somers, Margaret R. 1994. The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach. Theory and Society 23(5):605-649.

Steinmetz, George. 1992. Reflections on the Role of Social Narratives in Working-Class Formation: Narrative Theory in the Social Sciences. Social Science History 16(3):489-516.

Urciuoli, Bonne. 1993. Representing Class: Who Decides? Anthropological Quarterly 66(4):203-210.

*Neoliberalism/Transnationalism*

Ong, Aihwa. 1999. Fengshui and the Limits to Cultural Accumulation. Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality. Durham: Duke University Press. pp. 87-109.

Comaroff, Jean and John L. 2000. Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second

Coming. Public Culture 12(2):291-343. selection: 291-306.

*Gender*

Gray, Christine E. 2000. Myths of the Bourgeois Woman: Rethinking Race, Class, and Gender. In Gender Matters: Rereading Michelle Z. Rosaldo. Alejandro and Bill Maurer, eds. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press. pp. 185-217.

Scott, Joan Wallach. 1988. Women in The Making of the English Working Class. In Gender and the Politics of History. NY: Columbia University Press. Pp. 68-90.

Walkerdine, Valerie. 1985. On the Regulation of Speaking and Silence: Subjectivity, Class, and Gender in Contemporary Schooling. In Language, Gender, and Childhood. Steedman, Urwin, Walkerdine, eds. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul. pp. 203-241.

*Misc.*

Wacquant, L  ic J.D. 1991. Making Class: The Middle Class(es) in Social Theory and Social Structure. In Bringing Class Back In: Contemporary and Historical Perspectives. Scott G. McNall, Rhonda F. Levine, and Rick Fantasia, eds. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. Pp. 39-64.

Anagnost, Ann. 2000. Scenes of Misrecognition: Maternal Citizenship in the Age of Transnational Adoption. Positions 8(2):389-421.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1985. The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups. Theory and Society 14(6):723-744.

Thernstrom, Stephan. 1964. Appendix: Further Reflections on the Yankee City Series: Pitfalls of Ahistorical Social Science. In Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Pp. 225-239 and notes.