

Anthropology of the US

Fall 2017, CRN 16158

Instructor: Kathleen Piovesan

piovesan@uoregon.edu

Office: CON 366C (Inside CON 365)

Office Hours: Tuesday 2:30 to 3:30pm, Thursday 5 to 6pm

Course Description

This class explores the culture and political economy of the contemporary US, with a focus on class, race, and gender inequality. Specifically, we will look at how anthropology contributes to understanding different social groups, communities, regions, and social and political institutions in the U.S. And, how anthropologists have shed light on complex national (and international) problems such as rising inequality, poverty, debt, economic insecurity, and environmental degradation.

Cultural anthropologists use a variety of theoretical frameworks and methods. In this class, we will privilege ethnography as one valuable tool. In addition, students will have the opportunity to learn how to take fieldnotes, an important research method used by anthropologists. Although most of you won't become professional anthropologists, ethnographic skills, including close listening, rigorous observation, and careful documentation are valuable skills in many work and personal contexts.

Course Objectives

At the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Discuss and demonstrate knowledge of changes in the political economy of the U.S. from the 1970s through to the present, focusing on neoliberal changes in the economy and in state and federal policy.
- Discuss and demonstrate knowledge of class, race, and gender inequality in the U.S., including how it is produced through policy.
- Observe and record real world events in the form of fieldnotes.

Textbooks

1. Driving After Class: Anxious Times in an American Suburb by Rachel Heiman (University of California Press, 2015);

2. Stretched Thin: Poor Families, Welfare Work, and Welfare Reform by Sandra Morgen, Joan Acker and Jill Weigt (Cornell University Press, 2010); and
3. Polluted Promises: Environmental Racism and the Search for Justice in a Southern Town by Melissa Checker (New York University Press, 2005).
4. Other required readings are posted on Canvas by week

Course Policies

- Complete the reading assigned for each class before the class for which it is assigned.
- The ethic of reciprocity applies in this class. Put simply: treat others as you would like to be treated. If you have a different answer, interpretation or perspective than a speaker (including the instructor), share it without belittling or being otherwise hostile or defensive.
- Because we are exploring difficult, often controversial, issues, you are likely to encounter ideas or opinions that challenge what you might think or feel. Consider this class a chance to approach new or contentious ideas with curiosity and an open mind. It is not important that you agree with a position, reading, lecture. It is important that you carefully consider the information and engage actively with the material.
- **Bring your books to class. We will use them as part of discussion.**
- Turn off cell phones in the classroom. You can use computers or tablets to take notes, but it is not okay to surf the web, check your phone or Facebook, etc. during class.
- Complete assignments on time and with respect for the quality of your own work and the time of the person grading that work. Proofread your work before handing it in and use appropriate vocabulary and grammar. Although this is not a writing class, grammar and clarity of expression are professional skills and will be considered in grading.
- Academic integrity is crucial. If you are struggling with the material get help before you are faced with poor performance or the temptation to cut corners or cheat. You can get help during office hours or by appointment or from the Teaching and Learning Center <http://tlc.uoregon.edu/>. For more information about academic misconduct, see <http://dos.uoregon.edu/social-misconduct> For more information on avoiding plagiarism, see <http://researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism>
- If you miss class, it is YOUR responsibility to get notes from another student and to catch up. If a film has been shown it is YOUR responsibility to go to the library and watch that film. Feel free to come talk to the professor if there are things you do not understand or questions you want to pose about material missed, but do not expect me to re-teach the class you missed.
- Late work will be penalized unless arrangements have been made in advance. In general, if the work is handed in after class, but on the same day, the penalty will be minimal. If you hand in work the following day or later there will be progressive penalties for lateness.
- Accessible Education Center – see <https://aec.uoregon.edu/> Any student with a documented disability should inform the instructor early in the term of what accommodations have been determined to be necessary by the Accessible Education Centre.

Assignments and Grades

- Class Participation 25%
- Fieldnotes and Fieldnotes Journal 25%
- Book Review 25%
- Final Exam 25%

Grades and Percentages

A+ 99-100%

A 93-98%

A- 91-92%

B+ 89-90%

B 83-88%

B- 81-82%

C+79-80%

C 73-78%

C- 71-72%

D 61-70%

F 59% or lower

Schedule of Class Topics, Readings, and Assignments

Week 1	9/26	Introduction to the Course; Discussion of Syllabus and Course Expectations Readings: Course Syllabus, Schedule, and Assignments on Canvas
	9/28	The cultural production of policy and inequality; Introduction to inequality in the US context Readings (on Canvas):

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Kingfisher, Catherine "Tracing Policy: Translation and Assemblage" from <i>A Policy Travelogue</i> pp. 1-4 2. Weston, Kath "Chapter 5: Living on Debts and Promises: Montgomery after the Boycott, New Orleans before the Storm" from <i>Traveling Light: On the Road with America's Poor</i>
Week 2	10/3	<p>Introduction to writing fieldnotes; Class inequality/Class insecurity and Individualism in US society</p> <p>Readings (on Canvas and textbook):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Emerson, R; Fretz, R; Shaw, L <i>Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes</i> pp. 1-14; 29-34; and 45-74. 2. Heiman, Rachel <i>Driving After Class</i> (Introduction) pp. 1-32
	10/5	<p>Class, the making of the suburbs and gated communities; Fieldnotes Assignment</p> <p>First Fieldnotes Exercise (in class)</p> <p>Reading: <i>Driving After Class</i> pp. 33-103</p>
Week 3	10/10	<p>Class insecurity and individual solutions; "Rugged Entitlement"</p> <p>First Fieldnotes Exercise DUE</p> <p>Reading: <i>Driving After Class</i> pp. 104-170.</p>
	10/12	<p>Class inequality makes class insecurity; Differential impacts of class insecurity on the middle class, working class, and people of color</p> <p>Second Fieldnotes Exercise (in class)</p> <p>Reading: <i>Driving After Class</i> pp. 171-232.</p>
Week 4	10/17	<p>Welfare: A brief history and introduction to the idea and the policies in the US; "Welfare Reform;" The race, class, and gender of welfare recipients;</p> <p>Second Fieldnotes Exercise Due</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Frances Piven and Richard Cloward "Chapter 5: The Welfare Rights Movement" in <i>Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed and How They Fail</i> 2. <i>Stretched Thin</i> pp. 1-31
	10/19	<p>Administrators' and welfare workers' perspectives on "welfare reform"</p> <p>Reading: <i>Stretched Thin</i> pp.32-83</p>
Week 5	10/24	<p>Welfare workers' and recipients' perspectives on "welfare reform"</p>

		<p>Readings:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Stretched Thin</i> pp. 84-143 2. One-page scenario to be posted on Canvas
	10/26	<p>Life after welfare; Welfare and violence against women</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Stretched Thin</i> pp. 144-177 2. Davis, Dana-Ain <i>Non-Violent Survival Strategies in the Face of Intimate Partner Violence and Economic Discrimination</i> (on Canvas)
Week 6	10/31	<p>Is a reform of the “welfare reform” possible?; Return to a consideration of inequality and welfare</p> <p>Reading: <i>Stretched Thin</i> pp. 178-203</p>
	11/2	<p>Immigration and inequality: The narrative of immigration as a threat to the nation.</p> <p>Reading (on Canvas):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leo Chavez <i>The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens and the Nation</i> pp. 21-51. 2. Recent news articles about immigration regulations in the US to be used in a class exercise examining the Latino Threat Narrative (will be posted on Canvas). 3. Film: TBD
Week 7	11/7	<p>Environmental Politics: Race, Class, and Toxic Neighbourhoods</p> <p>Reading:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Polluted Promises</i> pp. 1-68 2. Website of the Hyde and Aragon Park Improvement Committee: http://haptic.org/ Explore the website and watch 2 or more videos. <p>Book Review Book Selection DUE (by email)</p>
	11/9	<p>Environmental Racism: Intersections of Race, Class, and Gender</p> <p>Reading: <i>Polluted Promises</i> pp. 69-147</p>
Week 8	11/14	<p>Environmental Racism and Activism</p> <p>Reading: <i>Polluted Promises</i> pp. 148-190</p> <p>Prepare Group Presentation of Ethnographies in Class</p>
	11/16	<p>Organizing to protect Native American territory</p> <p>Video (in class): Homeland: Four Portraits of Native Action</p>

Week 9	11/21	Environmental racism, settler colonialism, and land sovereignty among Native Americans Readings (on Canvas): 1. Watch a video timeline of the pipeline proposal and protest and read a recent news article: http://abcnews.go.com/US/dakota-access-pipeline-protesters-meet-authorities-emergency-evacuation/story?id=45533457 2. Read the Facts as presented by the pipeline company (click through the site to see arguments for the pipeline, the route, and other information): https://dapipelinefacts.com/ 3. The official site of the protest organizers (click through the site to see arguments against the pipeline, the route, news articles and other information): http://standwithstandingrock.net/ Book Review Due, Prepare Group Presentation of Ethnographies in Class Final Exam Questions Posted to Canvas
	11/23	Thanksgiving, No Class
Week 10	11/28	Course Wrap Up Group Presentations
	11/30	No Class
Final	12/6	Final Exam Due @ 12:30pm on Canvas

Assignments

Book Review

25 Points

In this course, we have only limited time to read the significant anthropological literature on U.S. political economy. To give us a broader sense of the research being done by anthropologists, I have selected 6 books, all available at Knight Library in ebook format that you will use for a book review. Instructions for how to write a critical book review are posted on Canvas. This assignment has three parts: 1. Choosing and reading one ethnography from the list (you must communicate your choice to me by November 7, 2017 by email); 2. Writing your book review of 1500 words by November 21, 2017 (due in class); 3. Presenting to the rest of the class with others who have selected the same ethnography on November 28, 2017. For the third part, you will meet in class with other students reviewing the same ethnography as you, agree on your presentation points, and then give a presentation. The purpose of this last part is to teach other students in the class about the research and arguments made in the

ethnography your group read. Grading for this third part will be done through combination of self and peer review (10 points). I will grade your individual Book Reviews (15 points).

Eligible Ethnographies: All are available through the Knight Library as ebooks. Selection is limited to this list since these ethnographies match the course topic, are available online so can be read by more than one student at a time, and keeping to a restricted list makes it possible to get through all the presentations in class time.

Berman, T. (2003). *Circle of Goods: Women, Work, and Welfare in a Reservation Community*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Davis, Dana-Ain. (2006). *Battered Black Women and Welfare Reform: Between a Rock and a Hard Place*. Ithaca, NY, USA: State University of New York Press.

Dyrness, A. (2011). *Mothers United: An Immigrant Struggle for Socially Just Education*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Lutz, C. (2001). *Homefront: A Military City and the American Twentieth Century*. Boston, MA, USA: Beacon Press.

McNeil, B. (2011). *Combating Mountaintop Removal: New Directions in the Fight Against Big Coal*. Champaign, IL, USA: University of Illinois Press.

Pérez, G. (2004). *The Near Northwest Side Story: Migration, Displacement, and Puerto Rican Families*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Fieldnotes and Fieldnotes Journal

25 Points

This assignment has 3 parts: Practice, Your Own Observations, and a Fieldnotes Journal. The readings assigned for Week 2 of the course will help prepare us for this assignment.

Part 1: Practice

We will watch two video clips in class (check the syllabus for dates). We will use these clips as practice scenes for learning to take fieldnotes. In other words, we will pretend that these video clips are real-life research situations in which we are interested. As you watch each clip, take notes as if you are a researcher. These notes will be messy and incomplete jottings that need to be fleshed out. Once I have shown the short video clip three times and you have taken as many jottings as possible, you are ready to write out your full fieldnotes. These notes are in full sentences and paragraphs and give a richer, more detailed and readable account of your observations. Hand in both the jottings and formal notes to complete the exercise.

Information about how to take jottings and turn them into fieldnotes is in the reading by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw on Canvas. These excerpts are assigned to be read before we do the first fieldnotes exercise in class.

Your Own Observations:

You will select 2 real-life situations in which you can take fieldnotes. These must include one informal publicly accessible situation, such as at the grocery store, in the library, or on the bus. It should be someplace where people are gathered and where you can observe their behavior and take notes easily. The other must be in a formal situation like community a meeting, court proceedings, city council meeting, or university administrative meeting that is open to the public. Observe each situation for 15 to 20 minutes (set a timer). Like the practice notes, during the real-life observation, you will take preliminary notes, then type them up in full once you are out of the situation. Hand in both the notes taken during the observation and the full typed version completed afterwards.

Fieldnotes Journal:

This is a chance for you to reflect on the experience and learning from the practice and real-life fieldnotes exercises. Answer the following questions in a short paper (maximum 1000 words) drawing on Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw as well as one other ethnography read in class as references. This assignment must reflect both your own responses to the questions below and the arguments made in the required sources:

1. What situations did you observe and why?
2. What did it feel like to be in a situation/location (real-life only) where you were closely observing others and taking notes? Did you try to conceal your activity? Do you think you affected the activity around you? Was it different for different kinds of situations? Why or why not?
3. What details did you focus on during your observations (in-class and real-life)? Dialogue? Description? Sequence of events? Other aspects? Why did you choose that framing?
4. How fully do you think you captured the scenario under observation through your notes (in-class and real-life)? What did you leave out? Is it possible to fully capture a scene? Why or why not?

Schedule:

Oct 5: Fieldnotes 1 Practice in class

Oct 10: Fieldnotes 1 Due

Oct 12: Fieldnotes 2 Practice in class (Note: I will grade and return Fieldnotes 1 before we Fieldnotes 2)

Oct 17: Fieldnotes 2 Due

Oct 19: Fieldnotes 2 graded and returned in class

Oct 18 to Nov 6: On your own schedule, choose your two observation sites, do your observations with jottings and then write up your full fieldnotes. Once all 4 fieldnotes are completed (including the practice ones), write your Fieldnotes Journal.

Nov 7: Hand in **all four fieldnotes** (jottings and final versions) **plus your fieldnotes journal**. Paper copies preferred.

Recommendation:

Choose your 2 locations for your real-life fieldnotes early in the term. Community meetings, university meetings, court proceedings and the like do not happen every day, so planning for this in advance will make it more likely that you will observe something of interest to you.

Participation

25 Points

Participation is a required part of this course. Our class meetings times will comprise only a small amount of lecture and the remaining time will be for large and small group discussion, solo and pair work with the text, analysis of news and popular culture as they relate to our main readings, and other activities that allow us to put our readings into the context of current events in the United States.

The total participation grade will be determined through a combination of participation in both the online and class forums. Activities that can earn you full participation marks include:

- Asking a question about readings, videos, discussion, or lecture, online or in class.
- Participating in small group discussion.
- Asking a question or making a comment that shows you are interested in, in agreement with, confused by, or in disagreement with what someone else (including the instructor) has said.
- Bringing in or posting a resource that adds new information or a new perspective on a topic being discussed.
- Adding to online resources and the definitions discussion thread (on Canvas).
- Asking for moments of silence or reflection when you need them.
- Paraphrasing what someone else has said to clarify or slow down the pace of discussion.
- Remaining alert and engaged throughout the class meeting time.
- Not checking your phone, Facebook, or the internet generally when in class.

- Participating in in-class writing exercises to give feedback to the instructor about the course.

Full or close to full attendance in class and engagement in half or more of the above activities will earn you full participation marks.

Final Exam

25 Points

We will not sit a formal final exam. Instead, I will post final essay questions online just before the last week of class. There will be 3 questions covering all the material taught in this course. You will select 2 of these questions and write 1500 word responses to each using multiple sources from the course. The completed exam will be due on December 6, 2017 at 2:30pm (the day and time at which our scheduled exam would end if we followed the final exam schedule). You will hand your responses in online through Canvas.