

Anthropology of Witchcraft (Magic, Science & Religion) (ANTHC 321.52 sec 001)
Mon/Thur 9:45 – 11:00 am in HN 732 - Spring 2010
Hunter College Department of Anthropology
Instructor: Yonatan Reinberg (yreinberg@gc.cuny.edu)
Office Hours: TBA and by appointment in Hunter North 716

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to both historical and contemporary debates in cultural anthropology over what is conventionally known as magic, witchcraft and sorcery. However, whereas traditionally anthropologists – coming from the West – sketched these belief systems as separate and more backward than “modern” ideologies, this experimental course will attempt to bridge both arenas, offering instead that an anthropological approach to the key concepts of Western thought, such as rationality, science and medicine is just as vital – and tenuous – to cultural creativity as magic. This class takes as its core analytic concept, then, that rather than distinguishing between these systems, we must see how they all **foreground the body, including race and class**, in what we assume to be merely religious, or old-fashioned superstition.

This course tacks, therefore, into two paths that may be different from a traditional anthropology course: first, we emphasize contemporary anthropological texts alongside old ones in order to analyze not just what they say, but how they were written (a reflection on anthropology itself). Second, it intends to call into question key assumptions built into our own cultural context by tying together work in different realms, hoping that through a class that questions everything, students will be encouraged to make creative connections between cultural theories and current social, political, and economic issues in order to better understand—and influence—the world around us and the peoples that occupy it.

COURSE DETAILS

weekly reading responses

You will be expected to respond weekly to the assigned readings, using the online Blackboard discussion application. Responses are due the night before class by 9PM and should be about a paragraph (150-200 words).

midterm exam

The midterm will focus on material covered in class and assigned readings, while emphasizing a distinct, personal approach to the material. It is thus particularly important to take notes during class that will serve as study materials. If you are absent, make sure to borrow notes from your colleagues.

final project

You will be expected to deliver a paper or project, related to this course, as a final. Your final project will be due the two weeks before class ends, and we will have a couple of presentation sessions.

absences, late assignments and participation

Because this course requires participation, attendance is mandatory and you are expected to be in class on time and prepared. Unexcused absences will affect your participation grade. If you have obligations that will prevent you from attending class, please communicate this to the instructors prior to your absence.

grading

Your final grade is based on the following proportions:

1. Reading responses/Class Participation/Attendance: 30%
2. Midterm: 30%
3. Final Project: 40%

Late assignments are automatically deducted a portion of a letter grade per day (an A becomes an A-, a B- a C+, and so forth). Extensions will be granted only in exceptional and documented circumstances. If you find you that you are either having problems with the material or that other circumstances are affecting your class performance, please speak with the instructor as early as possible.

plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense. The work you do in this course is assumed to be your own; whether you reproduce someone else's work "word-for-word," rephrase it, summarize it, or "borrow an idea," you must fully cite your source. If in doubt about how or when to cite, please see the instructor.

class conduct

This course covers a number of issues about which many people hold strong feelings. Part of the goal of the class is to enable students to learn from each other and communicate their thoughts on contemporary issues in articulate and compelling ways, so think before you speak: While everyone is entitled to their thoughts and encouraged to share them, please do so in a constructive way. Treat everyone in the classroom with respect, regardless of whether you disagree with their opinions. It should be self-evident that slurs or insults of any kind will not be tolerated.

COURSE SCHEDULE

We will be reading a large part/all of these books:

Staden, Hans. *The True History of his Captivity*. An old book, which is available in full in PDF that I uploaded to Blackboard OR you can buy the new retranslated edition with annotations and a great intro by Neil Whitehead (that one has this reference: Staden, Hans, and Neil Whitehead. 2008. *Hans Staden's True History: An Account of Cannibal Captivity in Brazil*. Duke University Press, June 30.)

Taussig, Michael. 1983. *Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*. University of N. Carolina Press, January 1 (Available at other CUNY libraries; sorry I couldn't put it on reserve. Also many many used copies online).

Weismantel, Mary J. 2001. *Cholas and pishtacos*. University of Chicago Press. (On reserve or plenty of used copies online).

All other readings are either available on Blackboard under "Course Materials > Required Readings," or on the interwebs. I also put some stuff under "Recommended Readings" that I thought were cool; read them if you're interested or ask me for more guidance!

Readings are subject to change – listen for announcements in class.

Class session / date	Readings
1 / jan 28	Class introduction, go over syllabus
WHAT IS MAGIC, WITCHCRAFT & ANTHROPOLOGY?	
2 / feb 1	<p>Winner, Lauren – WSJ: “Swine Flu Spells the End of the Common Cup”, PDF</p> <p>Houreld, Katharine – LATIMES: “Churches Involved in Torture”, PDF</p> <p>Rowe, Peter – “With Obama election comes the return of the vampire”, PDF</p> <p>“Zombies vs Vampires” - Available at http://epistemologie.wordpress.com/2009/07/13/zombies-vs-vampires/</p> <p>Adams, Guy – “Peru's 'human fat killers' were invented to cover up deaths”, PDF</p>
3 / feb 4	Evans-Pritchard, E.E. <i>Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande</i> : Chapters 1 and 2.
4 / feb 8	Levi-Strauss, Claude. <i>Structural Anthropology: The Sorcerer and his Magic</i>
5 / feb 11	Ginzburg and Rosenthal. <i>Ecstasies</i> : Introduction.
<i>feb 15th – no class, president day</i>	
EXTRACTING AND CONSUMING – OR, “YO MOM, WHAT WAS COLONIALISM?”	
6 / feb 18	Landes, Ruth. <i>City of Women</i> : Selections
7 / feb 22	Hans Staden part I (till “CHAPTER XXXII”)
8 / feb 25	Hans Staden part II (the rest of the book)
9 / mar 1	FILM: How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman
10 / mar 4	<i>Cholos and Pishtacos</i> – Part I (Estrangement)
11 / mar 8	<i>Cholos and Pishtacos</i> – Part II (Exchange)
12 / mar 11	<i>Cholos and Pishtacos</i> – part III (Accumulation)
13 / mar 15	FILM: The American Nightmare
14 / mar 18	<i>Devil & Commodity Fetishism</i> - chapters 1, 3, & 7
15 / mar 22	<i>Devil & Commodity Fetishism</i> - chapters 8, 9

16 / mar 25	MIDTERM.
<i>mar 29th – april 5th – no class, spring break</i>	
17 / apr 8	Discuss final projects
BUT WHAT IS RELIGION NOWADAYS, ANYWAY??	
18 / apr 12	Stewart & Stather. <i>Feasting on My Enemy: Images of Violence and Change in the New Guinea Highlands</i>
19 / apr 15	Ong, Aihwa. <i>Production of Possession: Spirits and the Multinational Corporation in Malaysia</i>
20 / apr 19	Pigg, Stacy. <i>The Credible and the Credulous: The Question of "Villagers' Beliefs" in Nepal</i>
21 / apr 22	White, Louise. <i>Cars out of place: Vampires, Technology & Labor in East and Central Africa</i>
22 / apr 26	FILM: Rosemary's Baby
23 / apr 29	Lemov, Rebecca. <i>World as Laboratory</i> : Chapter 11 “The Impossible Experiment” (188-221)
24 / may 3	Klima, Alan. <i>The funeral casino: meditation, massacre, and exchange with the dead in Thailand</i> : Chapter 6, “The Charnel Ground” (169-230)
25 / may 6	Presentations day 1
26 / may 10	Presentations day 2
27 / may 13	Last day of class, sum up