Section Themes and Learning Objectives

## Introduction Big Idea: What is anthropological theory?

We kick off the course with a consideration of what we mean by anthropology and by theory. What is anthropology as a way of understanding the world? What distinguishes anthropology from other worldviews, including those of other social sciences? What about theory? What is theory and how does it help to shape anthropological thought? Finally, we will discuss annotated bibliographies and how to write them.

#### Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, students will be able to:

1. Explain what differentiates anthropological thought from other ways of interpreting the world
2. Define theory
3. Write a concise yet effective annotated bibliography

## Section 1 Big Idea: Roots of Social Inequality

We live in a world characterized by vast inequalities, both among places and within them. Why do some people have seemingly limitless access to wealth and resources while others live in impoverished conditions and struggle to survive? Is it due to innate personal characteristics? To cultural or racial traits? To structural inequities? And how might different explanations for inequality serve different interests? In this Section, we tackle early anthropological theories about human sameness, difference, and inequality.

#### Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, students will be able to:

1. Articulate different explanations for social inequality and critically evaluate their merits and limitations
2. Identify key figures in these discussions and consider their social positions
3. Explain the difference between materialist and idealist worldviews

## Section 2 Big Idea: On Methods of Fieldwork

Very few of the theories put forward by social evolutionists were derived from robust, empirical research. This section's authors introduce calls for methodological rigor in anthropological knowledge production. An emphasis on fieldwork methods flips the direction of anthropological theorizing from deductive to inductive and demands that all claims about human societies be supported by cross-cultural evidence.

#### Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, students will be able to:

1. Define ethnography and situate ethnographic methods within anthropological thought
2. Identify major figures in ethnographic research
3. Explain what an emphasis on scientific methods contributes to anthropological theories of human sameness and difference

## Section 3 Big Idea: On Hidden Logics of Culture

Some cultural patterns seem too common or complicated to be explained by historical particularism, diffusion, or coincidence. Is it possible that humans do have a "psychic unity" that tends to produce similar cultural patterns across different groups? Things like adaptive behavioral norms, dichotomous thinking, gift exchanges, origin stories, and morality? In this section, we explore theories of hidden cultural logics: invisible yet prevalent human tendencies that drive cultural patterns.

#### Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, students will be able to:

1. Identify key figures and theories in these genres
2. Explain insights and limitations of these theoretical paradigms

## Section 4 Big Idea: On History and Power

Centuries of colonialism present a challenge to analyses of communities as bounded cultural places. This section's readings delve into relationships of power and history as they manifest in "local" cultures. In particular, these theorists call attention to how long-standing involvements in highly unequal global relationships have shaped culture in profound and historically specific ways: from racist and patriarchal structures (DuBois and Stoler), to repeated intercultural contacts (Wolf and Ortíz), to unequal vulnerability, impoverishment, and early death (Farmer).

#### Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, students will be able to:

1. Articulate the historical role of colonialism and slavery in shaping cultural traits such as racism and sexism
2. Explain how attention to power and history expand on and challenge anthropological theories of local particularity
3. Identify key figures and ideas in historical anthropology

## Section 5 Big Idea: On Writing Cultures

Just as some anthropologists began attending carefully to issues of power and history, others embarked on anthropological approaches that centered on personal, embedded, and phenomenological experiences in the field. By the latter half of the 20th century, postmodernism – an artistic and academic pursuit that challenged universalizing and positivist discourses associated with modernism – had become an important and controversial strain of anthropological research. In particular, theorists in this section call attention to partiality and subjectivity in research endeavors and to ethnographic writing as art instead of science.

#### Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, students will be able to:

1. Identify major characteristics of postmodern anthropology
2. Describe how attention to researcher experiences shapes anthropological writing
3. Explain an array of approaches to fieldwork that include audible, visual, and embodied forms of knowledge

## Section 6 Big Idea: On Colonialism and Anthropological "Others"

Anthropology emerged as a discipline in centers of imperial power and, intentionally or not, aided in colonial governance across the Western Hemisphere, Asia, and Africa. In particular, theories of scientific racism developed by early ethnologists were deployed as ideological justification for violent campaigns of dispossession and subjugation. And even anti-racist anthropologists associated with Boas tended to characterize Indigenous people as disappearing cultural remnants rather than as modern agents of resistance and survival. The theorists in this section demand that anthropology acknowledge and reckon with this colonialist legacy.

#### Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, students will be able to:

1. Describe the disputed relationship of anthropology and colonial systems
2. Critically analyze this legacy in anthropological research
3. Articulate critical theories that challenge the position of colonized people in anthropological projects

## Section 7 Big Idea: On Anthropology and Gender

Women had played an important role in anthropological knowledge production since the 1920s with Caroline Bond Day and Margaret Mead, yet most anthropological research still centered on the experiences of men, who were often unproblematically taken as representative of entire communities. It was not until the 1970s that anthropologists began seriously theorizing gender in relation to culture. In this section, we follow the development of anthropological theorizations of gender as they become increasingly complex, multifaceted, and robust.

#### Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, students will be able to:

1. Define gender, gender norms, and gender roles
2. Explain what a gendered analysis contributes to understanding the experiences of people with diverse gendered identities and expressions
3. Articulate anthropological theories of gender fluidity and diversity

## Section 8 Big Idea: On Queering Knowledge Production

While theories of gender had delinked biological sex from gender expression, the advent of queer theory troubled categories related to sex, gender, identity, and desire altogether. In this section, we explore queer theoretical explorations of power and sexuality, transgender classifications, and racialized sexual identities.

#### Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, students will be able to:

1. Trace important developments in queer anthropology
2. Explain concepts such as sexuality and transgender from an anthropological lens
3. Demonstrate familiarity with various expressions of gender and sexual diversity

## Section 9 Big Idea: On Social Position and Ethnographic Authority

Earlier writings demonstrated the potential of “insider” knowledge to enrich anthropological theories and called attention to the highly unequal landscapes in which anthropologists work. The essays in this section build on those insights to emphasize ethnographers’ responsibility to move beyond acknowledging inequities and do something about them. But what? There is no simple answer, but as a collection, this section advances an imperative for moral, political, reflexive, and engaged anthropology that unveils systems of domination and oppression and integrates multiple ways of knowing and representation.

#### Learning Objectives

#### By the end of this section, students will be able to:

1. Consider anthropologists’ complex, and sometimes conflicting, ethical and political responsibilities in the field
2. Articulate a range of approaches to addressing historical inequities through anthropological research

## Section 10 Big Idea: On Globalization

Since the theoretical interventions of the Boasians, anthropology had been concerned with understanding "local" cultures. But what is local about globalized culture and vice versa? The pieces in this section examine facets of globalization, including theorizations of place, space, citizenship, and gender. These insights compel anthropologists to consider the dynamic interactions of globalized and localized practices and their implications for anthropological fieldwork.

#### Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, students will be able to:

1. Identify key figures in anthropological theories of globalization
2. Articulate how understandings of globalization shape anthropological approaches to studying "culture"

## Section 11 Big Idea: On (Post) Human Ecologies

As devastating effects of climate change are ubiquitously yet unevenly felt across the world, anthropological insights into human interactions with environments, or human ecologies, are increasingly important. The readings in this section span several decades and illustrate the conceptual development of environmental anthropology over time.

#### Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate familiarity with concepts including cultural ecology, ontology, and pluriverse
2. Explain the role of political economy in shaping human treatment of non-human elements of the world
3. Describe how indigenizing perspectives shift the centrality of people in environmental conceptualizations

## Section 12 Big Idea: On State Power and Violence

State societies are highly unequal by definition, and they are also typically unstable (consider that most nation-states don't last more than a few centuries). How, then, do nation-state leaders mobilize state apparatuses (military, police, governance institutions) to maintain power and hegemony? This section examines the role of legalized violence in maintaining state power. In particular, the scholars in this section consider how categorical inequalities are maintained through force.

#### Learning Objectives

#### By the end of this section, students will be able to:

1. Identify forms of state-sponsored violence
2. Articulate how state violence upholds state power
3. Explain why state violence especially targets racialized communities

## Section 13 Big Idea: Collective Agency and Resistance

Highly unequal and repressive exercises of state violence beget myriad forms of community resistance. The essays in this section explore the ways in which people carve out autonomy, well-being, and organizing power to contest and transform their vulnerabilities. Far from treating marginalized people as mere victims, these pieces demonstrate how everyday agency shapes the world in big and small ways.

#### Learning Objectives

#### By the end of this section, students will be able to:

1. Conceptualize human agency, resistance, and refusal
2. Theorize complex relationships among state actors, non-state actors, and communities in struggle

## Section 14 Big Idea: On Anthropological Theory for the 21st Century

The essays in this final section consider futures with—and without—anthropological theory. What directions for anthropological research are pressing today? What techniques can help us build on existing anthropological work in productive and generative ways? And how can we use anthropology as a tool to not just understand the world but to act in it?

#### Learning Objectives

#### By the end of this section, students will be able to:

1. Articulate a vision for the future of anthropological theory