

ANTHROPOLOGY, RACE, AND THE MAKING OF THE MODERN WORLD

Course ID and 6-digit Number: ANTH 0020-001

Course Level: This is an introductory level course.

Course Description: Anthropology as a field is the study of human beings – past, present, and future. It asks questions about what it means to be human, and whether there are universal aspects to human existence. What do we share and how do we differ? What is “natural” and what is “cultural”? What is the relationship between the past and the present? This course is designed to investigate the ways anthropology, as a discipline, emerged in conjunction with European (and later, American) imperialism, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and the will to know and categorize difference across the world. The course fundamentally probes how the material and ideological constellations of any given moment shape the questions we ask and the knowledge we produce about human existence.

The course is loosely broken into thirds. During the first part of the course, we will explore a number of baseline questions through readings, viewings, and discussions: What does modernity mean and what inaugurated it? What are the legacies of the Enlightenment and science for our thinking about race and difference? How have anthropologists and museum practitioners understood race, and how has this changed over time? We will then look at how anthropologists in a range of settings have attempted to unsettle these legacies, and what some of the challenges have been in doing so. Finally, we will investigate questions of repair, reparation, and repatriation, drawing from a number of case studies.

This class is project-based, and information about the project will be discussed during the first week of class. Past projects have included the construction of a website for a conference on decolonizing museums (www.decolonizingmuseums.com), an exhibit that highlighted the legacies of scientific racism (<https://rottenfoundations.weebly.com>), and an annotation project.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF THE COURSE?

- 1) Students will come to better understand the foundations of capitalist modernity (Indigenous dispossession and genocide, and African dispossession and slavery), and will be asked to think about how these foundations both shape our knowledge of human difference, and of the political mechanisms through which inequalities are produced, reproduced, and challenged.
- 2) Students will learn the various approaches anthropologists have had toward the concept of race, and how these have developed over time.
- 3) Students will come to an understanding of the issues involved for museums in terms of collecting, exhibiting and research in relation to objects acquired through, and as a result of, native dispossession and imperialism, and learn about how people in a range of museum and academic contexts have worked toward repair and repatriation.

4) Students will research, develop, and create a public annotation of a classic anthropological text that addresses these themes with a view toward a present and future anthropology that is more conscious of the discipline's historical legacies.

HOW WILL THE COURSE BE STRUCTURED?

The class consists of two in person periods per week, and one section meeting.

- Preparation for class will operate through Canvas, and will be organized in modules (corresponding to each week of the course). There, you will find your reading and other assignments, including mini-lectures (which you are expected to have engaged prior to coming to class), and other relevant audio-visual material.
- Your other asynchronous work for the course will include weekly auto-graded quizzes designed to assess reading comprehension, and a weekly message to teaching assistants framed as follows: "I used to think...but now I know...".
- Five times during the course of the semester, students (in groups of three) will be asked to respond together to a set of prompts about the readings, mini-lectures, or other materials. Students will post these responses to the discussion board for the course.
- During class time, in addition to mini-lectures by Professor Thomas, we will either be working toward the final project, hosting visitors, working in small groups, or otherwise engaging with our own and other relevant materials.

A typical week would encompass 50-80 pages of reading or engagement with other audio-visual materials, and section work. Sections will work toward deepening your understanding of concepts raised in readings or other course materials, and small group work toward the exhibit.

There are two required books for the course (see below), and this will be available electronically through the library. Copies can also be purchased at the bookstore. All articles and other audio-visual material will be accessible via Canvas.

Moreton-Robinson. 2015. *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Hurston, Zora Neale. 2018. *Barracoon: The Story of the Last 'Black Cargo.'* New York: Amistad.

HOW WILL ASSESSMENTS BE DONE?

Students will be assessed by Professor Thomas and the teaching assistants on the following:

- The regularity and depth of their participation in the discussion posts;
- The regularity of their weekly message to their teaching assistant;

- The group work leading to the development and building of the project, and the timely accomplishment of tasks and intermediate deadlines;
- A short essay (text, audio, or visual) that incorporates students' final reflections on the process and content of the course/project.

Self-assessments will also be regularly conducted throughout the semester, but especially during the second and third segments of the class during which students are actively involved in constructing the website. These self-assessments will be done through Google Forms, and will ask students to answer questions like:

- Do you feel like you're doing more work, equal work, or less work than your peers?
- What specific tasks are you responsible for, and what did you complete?