

ANTH 30303  
T/Th 11:00-12:15pm  
Spring 2022

**Instructor:** Dr. Tracie Canada  
**Student Hours:** T/Th 2:30-4:00pm; by appointment

## Black Ethnographers



Amy Sberald, "The girl next door" (2019)



Amy Sberald, "Precious jewels by the sea" (2019)

### Course Description

What is ethnography, broadly defined? How is a scholar's ethnographic product shaped by their racialized experience? This course will reference texts over time and across academic disciplines to consider genre, style, audience, and purpose when engaging with this research method. We will use books, articles, podcasts, documentaries, music, dance, and poetry to think through the various ways that Black intellectuals have used ethnography to make sense of our and their everyday social worlds.

### Learning Goals

1. Analyze connections and power dynamics between the historical, the social, and the structural through anthropological theories and concepts.
2. Come up with a solid definition and understanding of what ethnography is, who constitutes an ethnographer, and how this method can be useful in everyday life.
3. Recenter and decanonize what we consider ethnographic knowledge and who we consider to be ethnographic knowledge producers.
4. Learn ways to consider our own social worlds and experiences through the critical lenses of ethnography and anthropology.
5. Since Black folks are not a monolith and all Black scholars are not the same, we will consider how one's lived experience and positionality is important to the research that is conducted and the populations chosen to work with.

6. Engage with the material in both traditional and non-traditional ways in order to broaden your skillset and hone your communication skills – both written and spoken. Similarly, recognize that scholarship can be seen more broadly than just written texts, as we engage with a variety of mediums.
7. Develop honest self- and peer- assessment skills.

### Course Guidelines

1. Attend class regularly and in a punctual manner.
2. Active participation and active listening are key. I expect that you are all prepared, engaged, and inquisitive when you enter our learning space.
3. Take notes in class. Handwritten is preferred, but I can be convinced to allow computers in the classroom.
4. Maintain an open mind to the topics covered and perspectives offered. I expect that you are all respectful of your classmates’ opinions and experiences, as some of the themes and content in this course are difficult and unsettling.
5. Do not plagiarize. There are plenty of resources online to help explain citation, but here is a helpful one: <https://libguides.williams.edu/citing/chicago-author-date>. If you are unsure about this or have any questions, please let me know, in class or in student hours.

### Course Requirements

Participation	10%
Reading response papers (10)	20%
Fieldnote journal entries (5)	20%
Un-essay proposal	15%
Peer review	5%
Un-essay	30%

### **Participation**

This course is organized as a seminar. Classes will be based on in-depth discussions, after we have all read and thoughtfully engaged with the course materials before class. To ensure the success of this model, all seminar participants are expected to be present, prepared, and attentive in each class meeting. We need to have already engaged with and thought through the course materials before each meeting so that our group conversations allow us to discuss the scholars, the works, the ideas and claims, and the ethnographic approaches. **Seminar participation is strongly encouraged through questions, comments, observations, discussion, etc., no matter if our class meets virtually or in-person. Attendance and participation are important to your success in this course.**

Course materials include works like readings, podcasts, videos, performances, photographs, and albums. All texts are provided. Most are hyperlinked here, **but all can be found on Canvas in the Module for each day of class.** Because of this, there are no required books. However, I encourage you to purchase any books that you would like to learn more about. I suggest using bookshop.org or Brain Lair Books (625 E Jefferson Blvd). You should have access to the texts in class on the day we will be using them.

## **Intellectual Biographies**

An important component of this class will be to learn about and understand who each of the assigned scholars are. The way we will do this is through collaboratively created intellectual biographies. Where did they go to school? What did they study? Who do they work with and where? What do they write about? What is their theoretical orientation? These are a few of the questions that should help guide your search. You will be expected to come to class with this information about each scholar for the day. For example, on the second day of class, you should be prepared to discuss who John L. Jackson, Jr. and Aimee Meredith Cox are. Each day of class, I will task a different seminar participant with taking notes and posting them to the class Google Doc. By the end of the semester, we will have a crowd sourced collection of intellectual biographies for each person whose work we engage. Your contributions to these will count towards your participation grade.

## **Reading Responses (10 responses due throughout the semester)**

A reading response is a short summary and discussion of the texts for that class period. These responses should focus on the scholar's main arguments and connections you notice to other works in class. You are expected to **submit these responses in advance of 10 class meetings**. These responses can take a variety of forms – written text, recorded audio, video, etc. Written responses should be about 400 words in length and recorded audio/video should be about 3 minutes long. You will be expected to keep track of these responses throughout the semester. Plan accordingly. Responses should be submitted via your Canvas folder **by 11am on the day the class meets**. Please include your last name and the date of the class in your file title. **At least 4 of these responses are due before spring break.**

Questions to help guide your engagement with the texts (for class and for responses):

1. Who is the author? What is their intellectual biography? How does their positionality influence the work?
2. Who is the scholar working with and referencing?
3. How is the ethnographic method being used for the argument? What is being argued? What is the scholar's contribution?
4. Who is the audience for this text?
5. How might this work connect with other ethnographic material from class?
6. Did anything surprise you about the material?

## **Fieldnote Journal (5 entries due throughout the semester)**

You will keep a journal, submitted via Canvas, in which you consider the social and cultural dimensions of an ethnographic setting that you choose to focus on for the semester. This place can be somewhere new or somewhere you have spent a significant amount of time, but you will need to turn a critical eye to the space. After you've spent time observing, I ask that you describe the setting, who populates it, how they're interacting with each other and the space, and what interested and/or surprised you on that particular day, among other considerations. I expect to see about 600 words of new material with each journal entry and you should submit **5 times during the semester**.

## **Un-essay Proposal and Peer Review (due March 29)**

A proposal for your final un-essay will be due a few weeks before the semester ends. This proposal

should include an un-essay title, a 200-word abstract of what you plan to do, and an annotated bibliography of at least 5 sources (you may include up to course materials). These proposals are due **by 11am on March 29**. On this day in class, we will hold a workshop so that you each receive feedback on your proposals from your peers.

### **Un-essay (due April 29)**

Directions to follow. This is just a sample of the assignments that fulfil the un-essay requirement. I'm open to suggestions, as long as you make a case for what you're planning to do.

- Podcast episode
- Interview/oral history based paper or presentation
- Something creative: poem, song, collage, performance, infographic
- Playlist of ethnographic performances
- Intellectual biography of one a new ethnographer + engagement with their work
- Zine
- Annotated playlist to go along with one of the texts
- Annotated ethnographic photographs
- Autoethnography
- Book review of an ethnography
- Create a teaching unit

## Class Schedule

### 1. Introduction

- “How Amy Sherald’s Revelatory Portraits Challenge Expectation,” 2019: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/new-work-amy-sherald-focuses-ordinary-people-180973494/>

### 2. What is Ethnography?

- Choose to be Curious Podcast, 2019, “Ethnography & Cultures of Curiosity, with John L. Jackson, Jr.”: <https://lynnborton.com/2019/07/24/ethnography-cultures-of-curiosity-with-john-l-jackson-jr/>
- John L. Jackson, Jr., 2005, “Real Fictions” (p. 22-28) in *Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity*
- Aimee Meredith Cox, 2018, “Why Anthropology?”: <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/afterword-why-anthropology>

### 3. Issues with Fieldwork as a Woman of Color

- Tami Navarro, Bianca Williams, and Attiya Ahmad, 2013, “Sitting at the Kitchen Table: Fieldnotes from Women of Color in Anthropology”: <https://doi.org/10.1111/cuan.12013>
- Maya Berry, Claudia Chávez Argüelles, Shanya Cordis, Sarah Ihmoud, and Elizabeth Estrada, 2017, “Towards a Fugitive Anthropology: Gender, Race, and Violence in the Field”: <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca32.4.05>

### 4. When Fieldwork Goes Wrong

- Christina Sharpe, 2014, “Black Life, Annotated”: <https://thenewinquiry.com/black-life-annotated/>
- Savannah Shange, 2019, “My Afterlife Got Afterlives” in *Progressive Dystopia: Abolition, Antiracism, and Schooling in San Francisco*

### 5. Black Anthropologists

- Zora’s Daughters Podcast, episode #12, “On the Shoulders of Our Ancestors”: <https://zorasdaughters.com/episodes/on-the-shoulders-of-our-ancestors/>
- Tracie Canada, 2021, “Reflection: Reorienting the History of Anthropology through Generations of Black Anthropologists”: <https://histanthro.org/notes/engaging-pioneers-reflection/>

### 6. Ethnographers Attuned to History

- Michael Ralph, 2020, “Finance and Violence”: <https://justmoney.org/m-ralph-finance-and-violence/> and <http://www.treasuryofwearysouls.com>
- Ashanté Reese, 2021, “Tarry with Me”: <https://www.oxfordamerican.org/magazine/issue-112-spring-2021/tarry-with-me>

### 7. Autoethnography

- Irma McClaurin, 2001, “Theorizing A Black Feminist Self in Anthropology: Toward an Autoethnographic Approach” in *Black Feminist Anthropology: Theory, Politics, Praxis, and Poetics*

- Aisha Durham, 2017, “On Collards”: <https://doi.org/10.1525/irqr.2017.10.1.22>
- Bryant Keith Alexander, 2006, “Fading, Twisting, and Weaving: An Interpretive Ethnography of the Black Barbershop/Salon as Cultural Space” in *Performing Black Masculinity: Race, Culture, and Queer Identity*

## 8. Materials

- Kathryn Mariner, 2019, “‘Who You Are in These Pieces of Paper’: Imagining Kinship through Auto/Biographical Adoption Documents in the United States”: <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca34.4.03>
- Whitney Battle-Baptiste, 2007, “‘In This Here Place’: Interpreting Enslaved Homeplaces” in *Archaeology of Atlantic Africa and the African Diaspora*

## 9. Digital Ethnography

- Bianca C. Williams, 2018, “Navigating (Virtual) Jamaica: Online Diasporic Contact Zones” in *The Pursuit of Happiness: Black Women, Diasporic Dreams, and the Politics of Emotional Transnationalism*
- Krystal A. Smalls, 2018, “Languages of Liberation: Digital Discourses of Emphatic Blackness” in *Language and Social Justice in Practice*

## 10. Documentary Film

- Watch *Making Sweet Tea* before attending class

## 11. Visual

- Deborah A. Thomas, “Tivoli Stories” exhibit, focusing on “Bearing Witness”: <https://www.tivolistories.com/>
- Miles Hodges and Andrew Wagner, 2017, “An Alternate Introduction”: <https://thephotographicjournal.com/features/an-alternate-introduction/> and “On Being a Black Photographer”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5RM0ESyIFRw>
- Su’ad Abdul Khabeer, 2021, “Umi’s Archive”: <https://www.umisarchive.com/index.html> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JWzeSWDMY68>

## 12. Performance Ethnography

- Katherine Dunham, 1941, “Thesis Turned Broadway”: <https://www.loa.org/news-and-views/1454-katherine-dunham-thesis-turned-broadway>
- Faye V. Harrison, 1990, “‘Three Women, One Struggle’: Anthropology, Performance, and Pedagogy”: <https://doi.org/10.1525/tran.1990.1.1.1>
- Maya Stovall, “Liquor Store Theater”: <https://www.detroitresearch.org/liquor-store-theater/>

## 13. Embodied Ethnography

- Kemi Adeyemi, 2019, “The Practice of Slowness: Black Queer Women and the Right to the City”: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/736516>
- Onaje X.O. Woodbine, 2016, “Healing” in *Black Gods of the Asphalt: Religion, Hip-Hop, and Street Basketball*

#### 14. Oral History

- E. Patrick Johnson, 2008, “Church Sissies: Gayness and the Black Church” (p. 182-192) and “Epilogue” in *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South*
- Zora Neale Hurston, 2018, “Introduction” and “I” in *Barracoon: The Story of the Last “Black Cargo”*
- Laurence Ralph, 2019, “Black Cargo”:  
<https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/710167>

#### 15. Essays

- Kiese Laymon, 2015, “Da Art of Storytelling’ (A Prequel)”:  
<https://main.oxfordamerican.org/magazine/item/702-da-art-of-storytelling>
- Tressie McMillan Cottom, 2021, “‘I Got a Second Chance’: From Puff Daddy to Diddy to Love”:  
<https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2021/08/from-puff-daddy-to-diddy-to-love>

#### 16. Letters

- Laurence Ralph, 2020, “The Torture Letters”:  
<https://www.nytimes.com/video/opinion/100000007205588/the-torture-letters.html>
- Imani Perry, 2019, “Fear” in *Breathe: A Letter to My Sons*

#### 17. Hip Hop

- A.D. Carson, 2020, *i used to love to dream*:  
<https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/monographs/m900nw52n>
- Su’ad Abdul Khabeer, “Sampled: Beats of Muslim Life” (browse the site):  
<http://www.suadabdulkhabeer.com/sampled-beats-of-muslim-life>

#### 18. Poetry

- Eve Ewing, “Arrival Day” in *Electric Arches* and “I saw Emmett Till this week at the grocery store”:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uuevV6pNIjU>
- Justin Wright, “The Cookout”:  
<https://www.sapiens.org/culture/the-cookout-justin-wright/>
- Joshua Bennett, “Token Sings the Blues” and “Barber Song” in *Owed*

#### 19. Podcasts

- Anuli Akanegbu, 2021, “Podcasts as a Form of Scholarship”:  
<http://www.americananthropologist.org/2021/04/29/podcasts-as-a-form-of-scholarship/>
- Anthropological Airwaves, 2021, “S03-ish, E02 (Crossover): Zora’s Daughters”:  
<https://www.americananthropologist.org/podcast/season-3-episode-2-zoras-daughters>

#### 20. Black English

- Zora Neale Hurston, 1935, “Introduction,” “One,” and “Two” in *Mules and Men*
- James Baldwin, 1979, “If Black English Isn’t a Language, Then Tell Me, What is?”:  
[https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/03/29/specials/baldwin-english.html?\\_r=1The](https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/03/29/specials/baldwin-english.html?_r=1The)
- Nate Marshall, “Finna,” at 40 mins:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pgdNu9imI3w>

## 21. Honoring Black Communities

- Ariana Curtis, 2018, “Museums should honor the everyday, not just the extraordinary”:  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/ariana\\_curtis\\_museums\\_should\\_honor\\_the\\_everyday\\_not\\_just\\_the\\_extraordinary?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/ariana_curtis_museums_should_honor_the_everyday_not_just_the_extraordinary?language=en)
- The Dirt Podcast, “This is Anthropology 4 – Diversity and Anthropology in our Communities (with Alisha Winn)”:  
<https://soundcloud.com/thedirtpodcast/this-is-anthropology-4>