

## SYLLABUS

# BEING HUMAN

SPRING 2024

2/25/2024

TIME: Friday 10am-12pm

IN PERSON: Temple Beth-El

DATES: 8 Weeks March 22-May 17 2024 (no class April 26)

ENROLLMENT: limited to 18

COORDINATORr: Donna Kerner

e-mail: [dkerner@wheatoncollege.edu](mailto:dkerner@wheatoncollege.edu)

mobile: 508.409.1840

**Title:** Being Human: Anthropologists who shaped the way we think about human nature

### Course Description:

Are humans different from other animals? How did our species evolve? Is our behavior determined by nature (genetics) or nurture (culture)? Why are cultures different from each other? Does the language we speak determine how we think? How are race, ethnicity, and culture related?

Join us in exploring how these big questions about what it means to be human were answered by some of the most innovative thinkers of the twentieth century: Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, Jane Goodall, Louis and Mary Leakey, Franz Boas, Zora Neal Hurston, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf.

**Resources/Expenses:** Our suggested reading will include *The Anthropological Lens: Harsh Lights, Soft Focus* by James Peacock, which is available used online for \$5 & up. This book is a useful introduction to the field of Anthropology and some of the essential questions it poses. If you already have a background in the subject you can skip this little book. We will not be using it as a textbook, but as background for understanding the context for many of the questions in the course. Each week I will suggest films, readings (offered as PDF files), websites, podcasts etc for you to consider. If you have a public library card I suggest that you sign up for Kanopy which is their free film streaming service. I have tried to find free streaming sources for the suggested films and Kanopy, YouTube, and Tubi are good sources.

**Format:** We will cover one of these questions per week. I will provide reading, film, podcast suggestions and class members will choose an anthropologist to focus on. The plan is to have two facilitators for each class focusing on the biographical background, questions generated, conclusions drawn, critiques, and questions for further exploration. See page on class facilitation tips for further information to get you started.

### About the Coordinator:

I am a cultural anthropologist who has lived much of my life in East Africa and the South Pacific conducting field research. My research interests include: Gender and Famine; Education and Class Mobility; Material Culture and Memory; and Entrepreneurship/Micro Finance. I am a

Professor Emerita at Wheaton College where I taught for thirty-three years and held the William Isaac Cole Endowed Chair, Department of Anthropology.

I moved to Providence from New York City in 1988 when I completed my doctorate and took a teaching position at Wheaton College, about 30 minutes north. I live on the East Side with my daughter Rebecca and two cats, Lucy and Harry and joined LLC in 2022 when I retired. What I love about taking and coordinating LLC classes is the wealth of knowledge, experience, and enthusiasm of its members. I really enjoy the engaged dialog and the unexpected turns a class can take that teach me something new each week. I look forward to learning from all of you this spring!

---

**Sign-up Sheet for Class Facilitation**

Two presenters are needed for each class. First presenter will focus on biographical background of the Anthropologist(s), questions addressed, evidence used. The second presenter will focus on impact of the research on our thinking about human nature, challenges to the conclusions, questions still unanswered. Please choose a date that works well for your schedule and a topic that interests you. Don't worry now about source materials—I can help you with those. Right now, we just need your commitment to sharing your interests with us.

**March 29. Topic: Human Evolution Anthropologists: Louis and Mary Leakey (possibly also son, Richard)**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

**April 5. Topic: Culture: Do Other Primates have it? Anthropologists: Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey, Birute Galdikas**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

**April 12 Topic: Does Race Determine Culture? Anthropologist: Franz Boas**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

**April 19. Topic: Is Culture Determined by Nature (genes) or Nurture (learning)? Anthropologists Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

**May 3. Topic: Cultural Syncretisms: Black Culture of Rural South, the Caribbean, Africa  
Anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

**May 10 Topic: Does Language Determine Thought? Anthropologists: Benjamin Lee Whorf and Edward Sapir**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

**May 17. Topic: Endangered Species? Wrap Up and Reprise**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

## GUIDELINES FOR FACILITATING A CLASS

### Choosing a Focus:

The course calendar section of the syllabus lists readings and activities for the class each week. You can use these readings/websites/films/podcasts as a starting point, but the goal of taking turns facilitating class discussions is for us to learn what passionately interests YOU. The course syllabus provides you with some sample sub-topics that might be explored for each segment of the course. You can choose one of these or suggest one of your own. I am happy to brainstorm with you well in advance to choose a sub-topic that interests you and to suggest some readings and activities to stimulate class discussion.

### Guidelines for Presentations

Two presenters facilitate class discussion for each class. The two presenters for the day may choose to work together or separately

#### Presentation Content

**The first presentation** in each class will focus on a biographical profile of the anthropologist(s) of the week and describe questions raised by that anthropologist and how these questions were answered (i.e., the evidence used to answer the questions).

**The second presentation** will assess the impact of the research produced by this scholar, how it shaped our understanding of the human species and then indicate what controversies were generated by the research and what questions remain unresolved.

#### Presentation Time and Structure

Presentations should last no longer than **30 minutes, with 15 minutes for discussion**. Whatever way you organize your segment of the class, we want to make sure you have left time for interactive discussion and questions. Please think of presentations in the **broadest** possible way. Some may want to use a Power Point. Others might choose to use handouts or a flip chart. You might want to organize your presentation by designing an interesting class discussion around questions or materials you send to the class in advance. These are just some options to spark your imagination.

#### Homework for the Presentation

Please use relevant research material from a variety of sources; not just Wikipedia, although you can begin there. Google Scholar Advanced search is also very helpful. Take your research and put together the presentation or questions in your own words. If you are using audio visual materials (that includes Power Point slides) keep in mind that sometimes **Less is More**. Please use the resource links provided on the LLC website to start you off (see next page). Also remember that in keeping to the allotted time, you are being courteous to your fellow presenter(s) who also have limited time to talk about their interests. No matter how you organize the class for the allotted time, please remember the old adage: how do good musicians get to Carnegie Hall? **PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE**. Make sure you have the materials you need well organized, check any digital files and backups, and do a run-through so you know you can present the topic within the allotted time. If you are using a PowerPoint for your presentation, please save your materials in both PP and PDF, marked with your last name, save on a thumb drive to use in class, and send me a copy of the PDF in advance,

## **RESOURCES FOR LLC PARTICIPANTS**

[A List of the Documents on the LLC Website \[www.lifelonglearningcollaborative.org\]](http://www.lifelonglearningcollaborative.org)

Explore the Member Resources pages on the LLC website, especially the page that links from Member Resources → Lead a Class Session page

- Downloadable documents to support high quality discussions and presentations
- Finding Content Online for Presentations and Discussions
- Turning Research into Presentations
- Setting Up and Leading Hot Topic Discussions
- Using Videos in Class
- Creating a High-Quality Slideshow
- A Step-by-Step Guide for Creating a PowerPoint Slideshow (MAC oriented)
- A Guide for Showing Slideshows, Videos, and Documents in Zoom's Screen Share

[The navigation route, starting from LLC's home page \[www.lifelonglearningcollaborative.org\]](http://www.lifelonglearningcollaborative.org)

Start here: The Lifelong Learning Collaborative's Home page

Next, along the top menu, click on: Member Resources

Next, in the drop-down menu, click on: Lead a Class Session

Tech support for your class members on the LLC website: Members Resources/Computer Help

1. Information available:

- Self-Teaching videos for the Mac
  - o Video on searching the web
  - o Video on downloading images
  - o Video on using a flash drive
  - o Video on advanced Google search techniques
- Self-Teaching Videos for Windows
  - o Video on searching the web
  - o Video on downloading images
  - o Video on using a flash drive
  - o Video on advanced Google search techniques

2. The navigation route, starting from LLC's home page

Start here: The Lifelong Learning Collaborative's Home page

Next, in the top menu, click on: Member Resources

Next, in the drop-down menu, click on: Computer Help

### **LLC Policies for In-person Classes:**

- 1. Food:** Food is not allowed in classrooms. Beverages are allowed, but must be covered. If you bring a snack for the break or lunch for between classes, it must NOT include pork, shellfish, or meat mixed with dairy. You may eat in the coffee room; please wipe up after yourself. Spring water, tea, and coffee are available for the beginning of class and during break. Please leave a dollar in the provided container to help us pay for supplies.
- 2. Parking:** Do NOT park in any assigned spaces. Vehicles parked in assigned spaces will be towed at the owner's expense.
- 3. Entry to the Building:** Entry to the building is through the back parking lot. Custodial staff will be available for approximately one-half hour before the start of class to admit you with your security ID card. Please remember to bring your card, especially during the first month of the semester until the staff recognizes you. These new security measures have been instituted to insure the safety of our members and the Temple staff. Please do not admit someone you do not recognize without proper ID. If you arrive late or need to fetch something from your car during class, you will have to buzz in by pressing the doorbell on the left side of the entrance.
- 4. Cancellations:** All information about class cancellations for any reason (including weather) will be communicated by the class coordinator through email. Please do NOT call the Temple Office.

### **Tacit Knowledge: (Insights into the LLC "Gemeinschaft"):**

- 1. Cultural Identity:** LLC strives to be an open, inviting, and inclusive community. We aim to make our classes and the classroom welcoming, participatory, and accessible to all.
- 2. Some Cultural Norms:**

\*People have different learning styles. Some think well "on their feet," while others take more time to process a question or idea. Please make room for those who need the time and space to voice their opinions. Be aware of how long you are talking and look for cues from your classmates who may want to make a contribution and who are waiting to take their turn.

\*Some are better at auditory processing, while others learn more from visuals. Try to bring both modes to bear on your presentations.

\*Even seemingly neutral topics can easily become emotionally heated. Try to be a good listener and suspend judgment. Remember that even offhand insulting remarks about politics or current events can make some members feel unwelcome or uncomfortable. Encourage and respect different opinions

\*Speak up. Everyone's hearing is on a different wavelength. We all want to hear what you are saying.

\*Don't forget to bring and use your name tent. Everyone's short term memory is on a different wavelength and we all want to be recognized by name.

\*COVID is still with us, as is RSV and the Flu. Everyone has different and legitimate concerns about contagion. Feel free to wear a mask if you are more comfortable doing so and please stay home if you aren't feeling well. I will send out a weekly email after class summarizing high points of the discussion. If you are starting to feel sick and you are due to facilitate the class that week, please reach out sooner rather than later so one of us can fill in.

\*Please let us know if you have accessibility challenges such as assistance entering the classroom and obtaining an appropriate seat or if you need enhanced communication technology such as a microphone. We will do our best to accommodate you and your needs.

# BEING HUMAN: OUTLINE OF CLASSES

2/28/2024

1. March 22. **Introduction** to the Course and Coordinator. First half of class go over the syllabus and discuss organization of the course, as well as expectations for class facilitation. After the break, Introduction to the Anthropological Imagination. What does it mean to be human? Some of the key questions highlighted in *The Anthropological Lens*.

**Reading:** *The Anthropological Lens: Harsh Light, Soft Focus* (James Peacock) 1994 Cambridge University Press (available used in pb \$5 or less)

2. March 29. **Out of Africa.** Where and how did humans first evolve? Son of missionaries, Louise Leakey, and his archeologist wife Mary, set out to find evidence that the earliest members of the human species were to be found in East Africa leading to the critical finds at Olduvai Gorge Tanzania.

**Browsing/Listening/:** download website: [www.leakeyfoundation.org](http://www.leakeyfoundation.org).

Biographies of these researchers to be found under "History" from the pulldown menu at the top of the homepage. Browse the site and check out one or two of the podcasts known as "origin stories."

3. April 5. **What is Culture** and do other primates have it? In addition to his archeological work, Louis Leakey recruited and trained talented team of field primatologists to study different members of the Primate order in the wild. Detailed years of observational research led to fascinating conclusions about social organization, language, tool use, mating patterns, and socialization of the young that challenge some of our ideas about what is unique about our species Homo sapiens. Jane Goodall (+Diane Fossey, Berute Galdikas).

**Viewing:** National Geographic Documentary "Jane" Available for Rental on Amazon and Hulu as well as the National Geographic website. You can watch the trailer for the film free of charge on YouTube and other films about Jane Goodall's conservation work on Tubi. Additional viewing if interested, "Gorillas in the Mist," fictional film about Diane Fossey's work with mountain gorillas.

4. April 12. **Does Race determine culture?** Anti-eugenicist researcher, Franz Boas, sets out to prove that culture, rather than race, determines behavior and thought. Boas established the first major department of Anthropology at Columbia University and went on to train scores of researchers who would go on to found the major research centers for Anthropology throughout the country. The signature of this school was the idea of Cultural Relativism and one of the central projects of early 20<sup>th</sup> century anthropology was to study and record what was left of Indigenous American societies before they disappeared.

**Viewing:** "Anthropologists" free on Kanopy

**Reading:** "Franz Boas" by Alexander Lesser (pdf) and "Franz Boas: The Anthropologist as Public Intellectual" by Stephen Whitfield (pdf)



**Additional Viewing:** two short documentaries on diversity and race free on Kanopy

5. April 19. **Nature vs. Nurture: Cultural Determinism.** One of Boas' first students, the poet Ruth Benedict (*Patterns of Culture; The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*), was fascinated with cultural archetypes, Gestalt Psychology, and how different cultures define what is normal and abnormal. She later took this interest into the development of National Character Studies during WWII, with the technique known as Culture at a Distance that created cultural profiles on America's allies and enemies. Her student (with Boas), Margaret Mead, went on to study how cultures shape personality throughout the South Pacific, to the chagrin of her mentors who would have preferred her to concentrate on North American indigenous societies. She became perhaps the most famous anthropologist of all time, writing for Redbook Magazine, appearing on the Tonight Show, and testifying before Congress on the dangers of nuclear proliferation, and the decriminalization of Marijuana.

**Viewing:** either/or "Margaret Mead, 1959 Overview of Anthropology and The Future" (an interview by her student, William Mitchell; free on YouTube), 1978 "Margaret Mead "Portrait of a Friend" by filmmaker Jean Rouché also on YouTube

**Reading:** "Ruth Benedict" by Sidney Mintz (pdf) and "Introduction to *Coming of Age in Samoa*" by Margaret Mead (pdf)

April 26—NO CLASS

6. May 3. **Voodoo/Hoodoo?** Boas was equally interested in salvaging the remnants of Black culture derived from African societies as a result of the slave trade. He trained the first generation of Black Anthropologists to study the syncretism of African and Southern Black American and Caribbean religions, beliefs, and story-telling traditions. One of his students, Zora Neale Hurston, was a prominent figure in the Harlem Renaissance. She wrote fiction and published numerous volumes on Folklore, as well as interviewing one of the last surviving former slaves of the last slave ship to reach the Americas (*Barracoon*).

**Viewing:** Either/or 2023 "Zora Neale Hurston: Claiming a Space" or 2008 Zora Neale Hurston: *Jump at the Sun*" (both free of charge on Kanopy)

**Reading:** Ch. 4 "Of Mules and Men" by Zora Neale Hurston (pdf)

Highly recommended: *Barracoon* by Hurston was only published in the past few years. Used copies are available by going on-line for as little as \$3.95.

7. May 10. **Does language determine thought?** Sociolinguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf (also of the Boasian school) posed this question which has led to many studies of how language can influence the way we see reality. While some of the original claims have been challenged, what became known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis found new life during the second wave of feminism in the work of Deborah Tannen and others. Their insights can also be seen as an influence on the rhetorical focus of schools of psychology such as CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) and DBT (Dialectical Behavioral Therapy).

**Viewing:** either/or “The Linguists” or “Deborah Tannen: He said, she said” (both free on Kanopy)

**Reading:** Benjamin Lee Whorf “The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behavior to Language” (pdf)

8. May 17 (Endangered Species Day!) **Wrap up and Reprise** What do we think is essential to human nature?

Reading/Viewing TBA