

Economic Anthropology

AN242
Union College
Fall 2006
MWF 11:45 AM-12:50 PM
<http://minerva.union.edu/fayd/06fall-econ/>

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Office Hours: Tuesday 1:30-2:30 PM, Wednesday 3-4 PM or by appointment

Course Overview

This course explores the social and cultural dimensions of production, exchange and consumption. We hear every day about “the economy,” an identifiably separate sphere of human life with its own rules and principles and its own scholarly discipline (economics). This class starts from the premise that this “common sense” idea of the economy is only one way to view the way people produce, exchange and consume in order to meet their basic and not-so-basic human needs.

This class asks some big questions. Do all people everywhere seek to accumulate property, and to maximize profits? Is “rationality” the same in every culture? Do all think the same way about debt, bribery, gambling or marriage payments? Do human economies evolve inexorably—for example, from public to private property, from cowrie shells to electronic money, or from gifts and barter to sale and credit? Or is the picture more complex and the direction inconstant? Is there really any such thing as a “free” gift? What does *The Godfather* have to do with the exchange of necklaces and armbands in the South Pacific? Who wins and loses from “globalization”? Why do people value things?

We’ll ask these questions in a characteristically anthropological way. In considering other ways of understanding the aspects of human behavior that are conventionally called “economic,” we’ll read in detail about peoples’ lives, including Maine lobstermen, Shanghai stock traders, Pacific Northwest Native American chiefs, and Zimbabwean cosmetics consumers. Throughout the course, we’ll take a cross-cultural perspective, confronting “Western” arguments about economic behavior and human nature with alternative practices and understandings.

Requirements

Read this syllabus. Understand the policies on grading, extra-credit and makeup work, attendance, and cheating. If anything is unclear, contact me for clarification. Always bring your syllabus to class in case changes are announced. *Check it frequently* to be sure you are aware of upcoming assignments and due dates. The syllabus is *subject to change*: we will probably watch more films than are listed on the syllabus, depending on availability. I will announce all changes in class and post an updated version of the schedule on the course web site.

Attend class. While I will not take attendance, this is a small class and absences will be taken into account in determining the participation component of your grade (see below). If you expect to miss class due to an athletic event or other commitment please let me know at least a week in advance.

Participate in class discussions. This class is a group effort, and will include much dialogue and discussion. The more members of the class contribute and are actively engaged in our discussions, the better the class will be. Participation also counts towards your grade (see below).

Do the readings listed prior to class. For example, you should read the selections by Malinowski and Wilk prior to class on September 8. The readings be necessary for adequate class participation. You may be called on if you are not an active participant.

Bring your texts to class.

In the classroom: Please turn off all cell phones, laptops, etc. You are welcome to eat and drink as long as you are not disturbing others.

If you plan to take the course pass-fail, you must contact the Registrar within the first three weeks of the term.

ADA Requirements

It is Union College policy to make accommodations for individuals with disabilities. If you have any disability or special concern, please let me know what your needs are in order that they may be accommodated. All discussions will remain confidential to the extent permissible by law.

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodations must also:

1. Register with and provide documentation to the Dean of Students Office.
2. Bring a letter to the instructor from the Dean of Students Office indicating you need academic accommodations. This must be done **within the first two weeks of the term.**

Required Texts (available for purchase at the Union bookstore):

Richard Wilk, *Economies & Cultures: Foundations of Economic Anthropology*

James Acheson, *The Lobster Gangs of Maine*

Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*

Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History*

Ellen Hertz, *The Trading Crowd: An Ethnography of the Shanghai Stock Market*

Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe*

J. Parry and M. Bloch, eds., *Money and the Morality of Exchange*

Assignments / Evaluation

Term paper (15-20 pp.): 40% of grade

The term paper will be developed through assignments over the course of the term and is intended to make you apply the concepts and theories that you will be reading and discussing. The paper should outline the social-cultural characteristics of a particular set of units of production in any one society (farmers, households of laborers, households producing for their livelihood, craftsmen, etc.) and describe how we should proceed to analyze their economic behavior in order to understand (and perhaps predict) their actions. You can base your paper on a case from the assigned readings (if you do this, you will be expected to consult additional sources beyond those covered in the course), from personal experience or from cases you are familiar with from other courses.

Reaction papers (450-700 words or roughly 1.5-2 pp.): 3 x 15% each for 45% of total grade

To help you prepare for class, stay up with the reading, and share ideas, you will write three reaction papers. You have considerable freedom in how you schedule these: you can turn one in on any day marked (R) on the class schedule below, but you should turn in at least one by September 29, another by October 23, and the last one by November 8.

The reaction paper assignments are simple. For the first half, summarize one of the day's readings, in your own words. For the second half, do something more creative with it: for instance, relate the reading to something you've read elsewhere, something you dig up in the library (including something you read as part of your term paper research), something in the news, or something in your personal observation or experience.

Class participation: 15% of grade

Class Schedule

Week One

Wednesday, September 6
Friday, September 8

Introduction to the course

In-class video – *Ongka's Big Moka*
reading: Malinowski, "Kula; the Circulating Exchange of Valuables" (www)
Wilk, pp. 1-9

Week Two

Monday, September 11 (R)

Economic concepts and anthropological research

P. Bohannan, "The Impact of Money on an African Subsistence Economy" (www)

Wednesday, September 13 (R)

G. Dalton, "Economic Theory and Primitive Society" (www)
E. Le Clair, "Economic Theory and Economic Anthropology" (www)
Wilk, pp. 9-24

Friday, September 15 (R)

Are there economies without scarcity?

Marshall Sahlins, "The Original Affluent Society" (www)
David Kaplan, "The Darker Side of the 'Original Affluent Society'" (www)

Week Three

Monday, September 18

Maine lobstermen and their economic lives

Wilk pp. 43-64
Acheson introduction-ch. 2

Wednesday, September 20 (R)

Acheson ch. 3-5, skim appendix

Friday, September 22

Acheson ch. 6-conclusion
TERM PAPER TOPICS DUE

Week Four

Monday, September 25 (R)

Rational choice and social change

Douglas North, "Institutional Change: A Framework of Analysis" (www)
Acheson and Knight, "Distribution Fights, Coordination Games, and Lobster Management"

Wednesday, September 27 (R)

Economists' critiques of neoclassical economics

Wilk, pp. 64-71
Deirdre McCloskey, *The Rhetoric of Economics*, pp. 1-28 (www)
Donald McCloskey and Arjo Klamer, "One Quarter of GDP is Persuasion" (www)

Friday, September 29 (R)

LAST DAY TO TURN IN 1ST REACTION PAPER

Julie Nelson, "The Study of Choice or the Study of Provisioning? Gender and the Definition of Economics" (www)
Diana Strassman, "Not a Free Market: the Rhetoric of Disciplinary Authority in Economics" (www)
Marshall Sahlins, "The Sadness of Sweetness," pp. 395-399

Week Five

Monday, October 2 (R)

Is there such a thing as a "free gift"?

Wilk pp. 73-83
Mauss pp. 1-32
David Graeber, "Give it Away"

Wednesday, October 4

Mary Douglas, foreword (in Mauss, pp. vii-xvi)

Friday, October 6 (R) Mauss pp. 33-83
James Carrier, "The Gift in Theory and Practice in Melanesia" (www)
James Carrier, "The Symbolism of Possession in Commodity Advertising"
(www)

Week Six

Monday, October 9

The capitalist world system: interconnections and dynamics

Wilk, pp. 83-90

TERM PAPER BIBLIOGRAPHIES & EXTENDED OUTLINES DUE
Wolf, pp. 1-11, 19-34, one case study of your choice from ch. 2 (this can
become part of your term paper bibliography!), 71-72.

Wednesday, October 11 (R)

Wolf, chapter 3; pp. 129-130; one chapter of your choice from chapters 5-
8

Friday, October 13 (R)

Wolf, pp. 265-278, ch. 10, one case study of your choice from chapter 11,
pp. 354-363, 379-383

Week Seven

Monday, October 16 (R)

Marxism in practice: communist economies

D. Berdahl, *When the World Ended: Reunification and Identity on the
German Borderland*, ch. 4: "Consuming Differences" (www)

Hertz, Introduction and ch. 1

Wednesday, October 18

Hertz, ch. 3-5

Friday, October 20 (R)

Hertz, ch. 6-end

Week Eight

Monday, October 23 (R)

Cultural economy: money and meaning

LAST DAY TO TURN IN SECOND REACTION PAPER

Wilk, ch. 5

Parker Shipton, "Bitter Money: Forbidden Exchange in East Africa"
(www)

Bloch and Parry, ch. 1

Wednesday, October 25 (R)

Bloch and Parry, chs. 1, 4 & 5

Friday, October 27 (R)

Bloch and Parry, chs. 6-8

Week Nine

Monday, October 30

Consumption, consumers and cosmetics

In-class film: *Advertising Missionaries*

TERM PAPER PRELIMINARY DRAFT DUE

Wednesday, November 1 (R)

Burke, chs. 1 & 5

Friday, November 3 (R)

Burke, ch. 6

Rob Walker, "Notes from the Brand Underground" (www)

Week Ten

Monday, November 6 (R)

Flexible accumulation: practices and metaphors

David Harvey (selections TBA)

Wednesday, November 8 (R)

Emily Martin, *Flexible Bodies*, ch. 7 & 11

LAST DAY TO TURN IN FINAL REACTION PAPER

Friday, November 10

term paper presentations

Week Eleven

Monday, November 13

term paper presentations