ANTHRO 152: CULTURAL ECOLOGY
Instructor: Dr. Eric B. Ross

Aim of the Course:
Cultural Ecology is the study of how human populations, through their culturally-patterned behaviors and associated beliefs, adjust strategically to their environments and of how such adjustments are expressed and maintained through linkages and feedbacks that make human groups an active part of those environments. This course takes as its point of departure the view that such a perspective, especially when applied in an historical and comparative framework, offers unique opportunities to understand the significance of temporal and spatial variation in human cultural patterns and, in doing so, offers a powerful corrective to simplistic generalizations about why people live, produce and reproduce in certain ways and to the common and comfortable assumption that what is different and not immediately intelligible is, therefore, irrational.

Weekly Reading, unless available on the Internet, will be available on Blackboard.

Assessment
Exams: There is no final exam during the final exam period. There are two scheduled in-class tests, each accounting for 50% of the final grade.

Readings:
The following books are required reading and available for purchase at the GW Bookstore.


SYLLABUS

PART 1: THE LOGIC OF CULTURAL ECOLOGY

Week 1. Introduction to the Course
1 (9.2) Introduction to the Course, the Subject and the Lecturer
2 (9.4) The Emergence of the Cultural Mode of Adaptation
Netting, Robert, Ecological Perspectives in *Cultural Ecology*.


**Week 2. The Ecology of Non-Accumulating Societies**
3. (9.9) The Logic and Lessons of Hunter-Gatherer Society
4. (9.11) The Reproductive Ecology of Pre-Industrial Peoples

*Reading:*

*Internet:*

Netting, Robert, Hunter Gatherers in *Cultural Ecology*.


**Week 3. The Development of Agriculture and Its Health Consequences (Disease, Health etc)**
5 (9.16) The Transition to Agriculture
6. (9.18) Contemporary Agricultural Transformations


Harris, Marvin *Cannibals & Kings*, Ch. 3 (“The Origins of Agriculture”)

**Week 4. The Ecology of “Human Nature”: Warfare as Adaptation**

7 (9.23) Population Regulation in Pre-industrial Societies
8 (9.25) Warfare and Animal Resources in Paleo-Technic Economies

*Reading:*


Harris, Marvin, *Cannibals and Kings*, Ch. 4, (“The Origin of War”)


**Week 5. Energetics and the Adaptive “Logic” of Material life**

9. (9.30) Contrasts and Convergence: Amazon and New Guinea Trajectories

*Reading:*
Week 6. The Cultural Ecology of Food Preferences in Pre-industrial Societies
11. (10.7) The Ecological Correlates of Amazonian Food Preferences and Avoidances
12. (10.9) Evolutionary Transitions in New Guinea Subsistence Ecology

Reading:

Harris, Marvin, Cannibals and Kings, Ch. 5 (“Proteins and the Fierce People”)


Week 7. Adaptational Problems of the Pre-industrial State
13. (10.14) The Ecology and Economy of Aztec Cannibalism
14. (10.16) The Enigmatic Decline of the Mayan Empire

Reading


http://www.monmouth.edu/academics/history_and_anthropology/reprints/HydraulicHypothesisS.pdf

Harris, Marvin, Cannibals and Kings, Ch. 9 (“The Cannibal Kingdom”)

PART 2: ADAPTING TO THE COLONIAL WORLD SYSTEM

Week 8: Underdevelopment and Cultural Transformation on the Capitalist Periphery
15. (10.21) Cultural Formations in the Colonialized World
16. (10.23) Adaptations to European Trade
Reading:

Netting, Robert, Northwest Coast Fisherman in *Cultural Ecology*.


VIDEO: *Sky Chief* (Scott Robinson, 1971)
http://www.antropologiavisual.net/category/universidades/universidad-autonoma-metropolitana/
http://www.antropologiavisual.net/2007/sky-chief/

Week 9.
17. (10.28) Mid-term Overview & Discussion
18. (10.30) TEST ONE

Week 10. Cultural Adaptations to the New Colonial Order
19. (11.4) Adjustments to Colonial Labor Demands

Reading:


NOTE: THERE IS NO CLASS ON FRIDAY, NOV. 6, AS I WILL BE OUT OF TOWN

PART 3: CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT IN COMPLEX SYSTEMS: FROM CULTURAL TO POLITICAL ECOLOGY

Week 11. Sub-Optimal Adaptation: The Contradictions of Poverty
21 (11.11) The Logic of Being Poor in Brazil’s Northeast
22 (11.13) Modern Malthusian Politics and its Fallacies: “The Tragedy of the Commons”

Reading:


**Week 12. Culture, Environment and Population in the World System**

23 (11.18) Population, Environment and Politics in Rural Development
24 (11.20) FILM: *The Legacy of Malthus*. (Deepa Dhanraj, 1994).

Reading:


**Week 13. Local Diets in the Modern World System**
25. (11.25) Beef Taboo and “Cow Love” in Hindu India

Reading:


ETC Group 2002 Genetic Pollution in Mexico’s Center of Maize Diversity.  Food First Backgrounder 8(2).

http://cgirs.ucsc.edu/conferences/whitefood/foodx/papers/wright.pdf

Harris, Marvin, Cannibals and Kings., Ch. 12 (“The Origin of the Sacred Cow”)

**Thanksgiving Break**

**Week 14 Struggles for Land and Water: Strategies of the Poor in an Age of Globalization**

27. (12.4) Fighting over the Global Commons: From Cultural Adaptation to Resource Politics

*Reading:*
Amazon’s Jungle Warfare – Brazil. Youtube.  
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQe7_g9DZZo&feature=channel


http://books.google.com/books?id=JMVSUEjTCWgC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs.ViewAPI

(12.11) **TEST TWO**