

Article Title:

Can we Use Hollywood for our Classes: Perfect Media Aids for Today's Introductory Cultural Anthropology Courses?

Running Head:

Can we Use Hollywood for our Classes?

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ABSTRACT:

Given the large amount of media available to teachers of introductory classes in Cultural Anthropology, looking to what the best choices are for content and viewing ease becomes an important issue. I propose that in addition to classic works, we consider using additional media, not from Ethnographic sources, but from the realm of popular Entertainment. Keeping in mind the critical topics, an instructor should be able to find media that suits their own teaching style.

[media, teaching, educational resources, cultural anthropology]

In 1970, at the American Anthropological Association meetings in San Diego, Robert Gardner screened The Nuer to a large anthropological audience for the first time. Probably everyone in the audience knew the Nuer from Evans-Pritchard's ethnographies. When it was over and the lights came up, we sat stunned. People said "Evans-Pritchard had never told us that the Nuer were like this!" (Heider 2004:420)

There is no question as to the impact of film on the teaching of cultural anthropology. It has been noted many times that no one ever sees a culture, but rather that they watch it expose itself as people undertake actions and interactions of their daily life. Ethnographic films therefore allow the student to watch such actions and interactions unfold, although they may not have the enthusiasm of the instructor of seeing such a precious gem caught on film. Even worse, the modern student is often not prepared to wait and watch it unfold over the course of what might be a relatively slow, dry event captured on film.

How then to best use this resource in teaching? Kottak notes that "contemporary students grow up in a high-tech, mass-mediated world" (Kottak 1997a:5) and that they force us to keep up. In examining the sound-bite and video-clip means by which they often absorb the world, it becomes obvious that we need to get across our information, those precious ethnographic film gems, in a fast-paced, entertaining way that still provides for actively demonstrating cultural elements.

One can look to the classics such as *Dead Birds* (Gardener 1963, recently re-released on DVD) and *A Man Called Bee: Studying the Yqnomamö* (Chagnon 1974) as templates that most ethnographic films follow. These have been used in introductory and even upper-level classes in cultural anthropology as a means of 'showing' culture happening, and for good reason. On the one hand, *Dead Birds* shows no anthropologists in action, but rather focuses on what the viewer is to recognize as the daily life of the study group and thus displaying the culture in action as though the viewer were a first-hand observer. On the other, *A Man Called Bee* puts the anthropologist and the work of doing anthropology at the forefront, showing not only the culture in action, but how one might capture it. But, in screening these for many classes, it becomes obvious that even with Gardner's storylines and Chagnon's explanative narration, the modern student is easily distracted.

What are we trying to teach?

Are such films then the optimal way to convey all those principles and structures that we try to impart to students in introductory classes in a way that they will understand the principles and apply them outside of the theoretical frameworks we construct from cross-cultural analyses? In examining six introductory texts, one can get an idea of what the authors feel is critical to pass along to students in the classroom (Table 1). Looking at the concepts most shared (contained within four or more texts), we find a focus on concepts of Culture, Culture Change, Economics, Enculturation/ Cognitive Map Development, Family/ Domestic Groups, Gender, Introduction/ to Physical Anthropology/ to Archaeology/ to Linguistics/ to Cultural Anthropology, Kinship, Language/ Communication, Marriage, Methods/ Fieldwork Preparation, Political Organization/ Social Control, Religion/ Supernatural World, Social Order/ Stratification, Subsistence, and The Arts.

If these are the major concepts that we are trying to convey, optimally, we should want a media program which presents all (or most) of them. There is no doubt that films like *Dead Birds* and *A Man Called Bee* are still shown, their values no less detracted from the time past, and, in some cases, the discussions of their methods of filming, the focuses, oversights and inconsistencies can provide for great discussion of cultures and the actors within them. *Dead Birds*' DVD re-release has the potential to change this slightly with the use of Gardner's optional commentary; however, time constraints are unlikely to allow an instructor to screen the film multiple times. But, the question arises, how well do they work for these concepts?

Certainly, *Dead Birds* spends feet of film on formal warfare and Gardner's narrative impresses upon the viewer how all of this warfare, and in fact other parts of life, are all intertwined with views of the supernatural. The viewer catches glimpses of the shell jewelry, the feathered headdresses and other accoutrements of the warrior when he is on display, but where is the rest of Dani art? Likewise, what is the political organization? The viewer told that the 'main character', Wayak, has several wives, so we infer polygyny, but what is the family structure, kinship importance and post-marital living arrangements? How was the data gained?

Likewise, *A Man Called Bee* is a great explanation of Chagnon's fieldwork, and he explains how he gathered and cross-checks names, genealogies, kinship relations and village fissioning amongst the Yąnomamö, yet within the movie we are left unsure of what a family actually looks like. We catch bits of some shamanic activities, but do not get a good idea about what their supernatural world is like. In fact, we see very few interactions in this film which do not involve the Yąnomamö interacting with Chagnon, which is fine from the fieldwork angle, but as an ethnographic account, it perhaps leaves the viewer with tantalizing bits of those important aspects and an unfulfilled feeling.

These views of two such iconic films are perhaps unfair. *Dead Birds* was followed up by two other short films by Heider which flesh out in more detail the agricultural and residential aspects of the Dani, and *A Man Called Bee* has 20 other accompanying films which flesh out much of Yąnomamö life, and use of clips from them can be seen in *A Man Called Bee*. The Dani-related films run a total of 188 minutes and the Yąnomamö-related ones produced by Chagnon alone run a total of 386 minutes. These represent between 3.76 and 7.72 50 minute class periods. If all the Yąnomamö-related films were shown, nearly 20% of an introductory class would be spent in watching, a staggering amount when one considers how much needs to be conferred to the student during the short semester.

In some ways, however, it is not the fault of the film-maker or of the people being filmed that causes any problems in conferring the data in these films. In this age of ‘reality television’, we see students who are not concerned with the everyday trivialities of life, no matter whose. Unfortunately for us, it is in those everyday activities that culture lies, as the people being film enact the rules of culture. However, in looking at the subjects of the films as actors, we might find a better way to impart our cultural knowledge in a sense that our students will grasp and carry with them.

One answer is to look to our modern mass media as a modern anthropological teaching device. Constructed to entertain and appeal to modern audiences “many fictional feature films grapple with anthropological concepts or problems” (Heider 2004:xxii). Such media need not be limited to full feature-length films either, as those have already been noted to take up valuable class time as they get their message across (Heider 1997:146). With some discrimination, episodes of shows such as the sarcastic and biting program *Duckman*, the fatalistic action-packed animated series *Roughnecks: Starship Troopers Chronicles*, the classist and intellectualist series *Frasier* (See Gates 2004), or the classic or new versions of Roddenberry’s *Star Trek* can be used to great effect in highlighting one or even two cultural aspects in a 22 or 44 minute episode. But, for maximum coverage, I suggest finding shows that fit your teaching style.

An Example of Enculturation: Of Flesh and Steel

“Of Flesh and Steel” (1999) is an episode of Raynis, Capizzi, and Kline’s *Roughnecks: Starship Troopers* series which, in turn draws on Robert Heinlein’s *Starship Troopers* book for its setting. This episode was written by Steve Melching, with Thomas Pugsley and Greg Klein as story editors, and directed by Alan Caldwell. This series focuses on the development of a team through the struggles of a squad of mobile infantry troopers in an interplanetary war against ‘the bugs’. Here, we have easy recognition of ‘the others’, as well as plenty of exposition, as the series moves far into areas left out of Heinlein’s novel. This, combined with the full CGI production of the show lends for a

surprisingly detailed and useful array of character actions, expressions and other means of communication.

In this particular episode, the troopers, who have worked out many of their personal differences, are being aided by a “cybernetic humanoid assault system”. CHAS, as he comes to be known, is an artificial intelligence-driven robot which is capable of learning in a human-like manner. The importance of this comes up as it is described as having the weaponry and skills of an entire squad of human troops. The anthropological relevance comes up as this ultra-logical entity is slowly enculturated. We can see the ‘physical’ superiority of the robot in terms of endurance and mobility, but the utter lack of tact, teamwork, and combat experience of the troopers.

As deriding of the robot as most of the troopers are, Jenkins, the journalist who is already somewhat of an outsider within the combat-intensive squad, is the one to try and help the robot to fit in. This after the robot saves his life and he tries to thank it. As Jenkins attempts to explain idioms, the robot does not grasp the communication concepts, and recognizes only the literal interpretation. This literal aspect works out nicely for further exposition as it begins to lecture at an inappropriate moment. Reprimands from squadmates over a choice between pressing an attack or aiding a debilitated member of the squad and an offer to ‘project an acceptable casualty rate’ furthers the enculturation, and sets the basis for what will be the final ‘conflict’ of the robot.

When the squad finds itself in the midst of a minefield, the robot displays its ‘humanity’ in rescuing Jenkins as it sacrifices itself. This action is a representation of the synthesis of all the core elements the troopers conveyed during the reprimands. Jenkins’ epilogue points out the acceptance of the robot as ‘one of their own’ after displaying these traits; a noble humanity that the troopers themselves would espouse.

As this episode is only 20 minutes long, and nearly 4 and a half minutes of that is combat, the pace is necessarily fast and the elements of enculturation direct and explicit. Important values and simple idioms are all we can see being taught, but the change in the robot’s actions and speech are dramatic, and easily recognized by the viewer. They also are indicative of the importance aspects of enculturation allowing members to share commonalities to reduce social friction and wasted energies as well as for survival aspects.

An Example of Experience, Belief, and Perception of the Supernatural: T.V. or Not To Be.

“T.V. or Not To Be” (1994), an episode of Duckman, written by Bernie Keating and directed by Raymie Muzquiz, is one of the satirical comments on American life, typical of the show created by Everett Peck. This series follows the life of Duckman, a rather incompetent and amoral detective, his family and partner Cornfed. Duckman is the

social outlier who says and does the wrong things to explicate the issue being commented upon and Cornfed is the know-it-all, do-it-all, competent one who cleans things up on a regular basis. As for the rest of Duckman's family, we get a vignette of their stereotypes in the beginning, which helps to not only give a perspective for Duckman, but also aids in motivating him to get involved with the plot. But, even past the commentary on the American culture and its preoccupation with television especially, this episode explores beliefs and how they are created and maintained.

In this episode, Duckman and his partner Cornfed set out to retrieve a painting of "The Blessed Mother of the Weeping Soles" for televangelist Mother Mirabelle. Mother Mirabelle, of course, represents all that is untrustworthy about high profile religious figures (this plays off the Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker scandal. Mother Mirabelle can be noted with the 'runny' eye makeup that Tammy Faye Bakker was seen with after the Jessica Hahn scandal.) The painting, whose feet are purported to perspire, brings miracles to believers. In an attempt to get the painting from Big Da Da Duchamp's art gallery he is attacked by Duchamp's henchmen and subjected to a near-death experience. In this, he ends up in Heaven, where he not only gets his every wish (smoking, beef, alcohol, and revenge on his sister-in-law), but God gives him an Etch-A-Sketch with the meaning of life written on it to take back with him. Involved here is a very brief questioning of the scientific validity of discussions of 'near death' experiences. As he wakes, he is convinced that he experienced a miracle, and begins to attempt to tell people about his experiences. Cornfed, who unravels the case, later explains to Duckman how, through the combination of the effects of the plastic Duckman was wrapped in and the items on the television while Duckman was in the hospital, it wasn't a miracle at all. There is a brief discussion of the feelings of security that come with religious beliefs as well.

Here, in dealing with the supernatural world, the experiential aspects of belief can be seen, as well as the implications of the effects of altered states of consciousness on perception. Aspects of shared reinforcement of beliefs and understandings of the supernatural world through 'testimonials' of experiences can be discussed, as can the aims of organized religions, in terms of the social power and the means by which they maintain control within their culture. In with all of this, there is, of course the commentary on the influence of television on the American public, leading to discussions of or elucidations on the 'power' of mass media to influence culture or ethics.

Again, with only 22 minutes of air-time, this is a glossed version of what might be a prophet's story, and it needs to end in a way that sets up a world with no change, so that the next episode starts with the same premise. But, the fast pace and the biting humor can serve to draw in students, and highlight aspects particularly relevant to an introductory anthropology class.

An Example of Venturing into a New Culture: Mirror, Mirror

In the 1967 episode of Star Trek, “Mirror, Mirror”, we see a wonderful example of a small group of characters finding themselves being ‘the other’ in a culture much like their own, but at the same time, profoundly different. Written by science fiction giant Gene Roddenberry and Jerome Bixby, the writer of ‘Fantastic Voyage’, this episode takes the familiar Star Trek universe and changes the ‘Prime Directive’ from its peaceful, non-interfering ethic to one where might makes right. Kirk, McCoy, Scott and Uhura, transported during an ion storm find themselves in this alternate universe. As such, they have to quickly learn the rules of this new situation and fake them in order to survive long enough to find a way to get back to their own universe.

The dichotomy between these two universes is shown nicely as we see the ‘conspiratorial’ four crew members gathering to discuss their plight and working together in ways they otherwise might not as they maintain certain activities that are expected of them, as well as trying to hide themselves from those who might do them harm. Attacks occur, and the intricacies of the alternate universe are revealed, as when Chekov and his hired security men turn on Kirk to kill him. Methods of punishment are corporal and when serious are usually, it is implied, to the death. Also nicely entrenched in this is the overt appeal to the alternate Spock’s logic about how flawed this alternate universe’s approach is. The alternate Spock recognizes that the current political system is destined to fail, and yet works with the prevailing system, pointing out how strong cultural systems can be.

This episode bears lessons for the anthropologist seeking to become a participant observer. Just as cultural happenings and stresses don’t always wait for an anthropologist to get ‘settled’, this episode throws the four main characters into not only a different system, but also a tense and dangerous happening in this universe. Because they not only have to deal with how to get home to their own reality, but also how to deal with the stresses of the Halkan Council’s refusal to allow the Federation/ Empire access to their dilithium crystal resources. Kirk knows what he would do in his own universe, and has to work within the framework of the alternate universe where he is expected to do the opposite. An anthropologist might often be forced to do things within another culture’s framework, an example of the tangible need for the concept of cultural relativism.

We can also get a look at the ruthless nature of a political system whereby ‘might makes right’, not only between the Empire and other cultures, but within the ship’s crew as well. The fact that the alternate Kirk rose to power after assassinating Pike, and that Sulu remarks to Spock how close he is to the Captaincy, shows another dynamic for the characters to deal with. Not only can the four main characters not trust the alternate universe counterparts, but they must be extra careful not to let the others know, as everyone in this universe seems to watch the others for potential weakness. Thus, the overall view of the Universe bleeds into other aspects of culture, helping to show the holistic nature of culture.

An Overall Example: Jaynestown

“Jaynestown” (2002), an episode of Joss Whedon’s short-lived *Firefly* series, was written by Ben Edlund and directed by Marita Grabiak. While the series itself focuses on a crew of nine on a spaceship, this particular episode thrives on the interactions of not only crew members but also of those of the culture of the planet they have landed on. Set up for a modern audience, even with the science-fiction basis, there is an excellent elucidation of many of the aspects of the culture they are encountering. These are conveyed in a means that flows in an unforced manner as natural conversation between the characters. Additionally, the actors involved in production of this show are all based within the western culture, so the gestures and facial expressions, as well as most of the language, are all easily understood, but additionally, these are, perhaps, accented a bit to make sure that the viewer picks up on them.

It should be noted that some of these aspects display themselves within the crew, some within the society they visit, and some between those two groups. For the crew, the major players are Mal (Captain), Zoe (First Mate), Wash (Pilot), Jayne (Hired Gun), Kaylee (Mechanic), Simon (High-born Doctor), River (Simon’s teenage sister), Book (Preacher) and Inara (Companion). Within the society is Magistrate Higgins (Owner/Political Ruler), Fess (Magistrate’s son), the foreman of the mining operation, and Meadows (a young miner, colloquially known as a ‘mudder’ in this society). Outside of these groups is the last major player, Stitch (ex-partner of Jayne’s). While there are more background characters, these major players are the ones to focus on in order to examine most of the interactions which will be anthropologically useful.

Within the episode there are three main storylines which are interwoven. First is the smuggling job for the crew. Second is the aspect of Jayne, the hero, and third is Inara’s liaison with Fess. The smuggling job is first complicated by the fact that the contact on the planet has been killed, then by the fact that Jayne is recognized. The theft that Jayne attempted years before but didn’t successfully complete distributed a very large sum of money to the indentured servants of the company town. As such, Jayne is wanted by the Magistrate who he stole from and loved by the townspeople. Inara has been hired to euphemistically make Fess ‘a man’, but she has not only to deal with helping Fess but with the control of his father.

In examining Economics, a complex system is visible, with several topics which are usually found within introductory texts. One of the glaring economic items one can look to is the use of Jayne as a hero in the ‘Robin Hood’ capacity, seeming to fix a broken or corrupt redistribution system. Discussion points can be made about the redistribution system which is not keeping the majority of the population satisfied, as well as the additional elements of economic servitude and fixed market controls (a

'Company Town') that create the situation within the visited population. The 'Robin Hood' topic is most distinctly expressed in a line from the 'Ballad of Jayne' during the show: "and he saw the Magistrate taking / every dollar an' leavin' five cents". Combined with the foreman's spiel to Simon about how they have "over two-thousand workers, mostly indentured. We pay them next to nothin', that way we can pass the savings directly on to you-the-customer," this gives a rather bleak set of prospects for the economic mobility of the mudders within the formal economy. This leads into the recognition that the crew is involved in illegal trade that would be viewed as part of an informal economy. Lastly, one could look to what, in this case, would be not only a global economic market, but a multi-global economy, and how easy it would be in such a system to not understand the plight of the workers who produce the 'mud'.

In looking to Religion/the Supernatural, there are examples that are obvious as well as subtle. For some of the obvious examples of supernatural concepts, one can look to the clashes between the River and Book. One example is in the dealings with the holy text (the Bible), which is analyzed and interpreted literally by River, showing how religions, even codified ones, need not be logically consistent if they are internally consistent. River's subsequent removal of pages from the text and Book's reaction bring up aspects of how an object can have interpretations which are both profane and sacred. River later recognizes this when she returns the pages, stating "I tore these out of your symbol and they turned into paper ...". Another example is where Book discusses aspects of belief and faith and how they can over-ride some of the logical aspects of one's life. This is displayed somewhat when River reacts badly to the amount of loose hair Book has. Book attempts to explain the why, in terms of the supernatural 'meaning' of the long hair ("it's the rules of my order ... like the book, it symbolizes-"), but is cut off from finishing by Zoe. Zoe's attempt at a practical solution to the situation recognizes at some level the inherent issues of dealing with complex theological explanation of symbology.

In the realm of political organization and social control, one of the first places we find this is in law. Mal and Jayne's confrontation in the infirmary is over the carrying of a weapon in a place which "don't allow guns in their town". We also find out that stealing things is against the law, as is smuggling. The sanctions which can be taken are also brought forth, smuggling's penalty being recounted in how the contact they were looking for had been punished when the prods had "hacked off his hands and feet with a machete and rolled him into the bog", while for theft, how Jayne's partner who had been caught had been locked in a 'hot box' for four years. In this we can see some of the other elements of keeping order. If the penalties for committing a crime are this atrocious, people will be rightfully afraid and conform to the laws, unless of course they have a vested interest in not doing so, as in the case of the mudders keeping the money from Jayne's heist and again resisting when the statue of Jayne is in danger of being removed. These cases show the power of masses which are usually down-trodden and kept in their

place by a relatively small number of people, as well as how faith in something can be a powerful motivator. While the standing of their ground over the money is for their own well-being, the riot over Jayne's statue shows them fighting for a belief instead. Lastly, one of the items which can be explored is the privileges of the social elite within the realm of control. This comes to bear with the situation of Stitch after the Magistrate has been told that Jayne has returned. Here, Stitch is released and provided with a loaded shotgun, something directly in contradiction with the laws of the town, but it is the Magistrate who points Stitch toward Jayne and orders the foreman that Stitch is to confront Jayne, not the prods.

While rituals are often tied to the supernatural realm, some are only social. The incidence of ritual that exists in Jaynestown is an excellent example of a 'Rite of Passage'. Fess, the Magistrate's son, needs to not be a virgin to become a man according to his father. Inara, in her role as what the series calls a "Companion" (a part-geisha part-high-class-prostitute), has been contracted to deal with the 'problem'. When the viewer actually figures all this out, Inara is in her shuttle, preparing what looks like two cups of tea. As she explains to the Magistrate as she escorts him out, the "Companion Greeting Ceremony is a ritual with centuries of tradition" and that her shuttle is "a consecrated Place Of Union" (capitalization from shooting script 09/11/02). While this lets the viewer know that this area is special, it also provides for the first step in a rite of passage for Fess, separation. The following scenes with Inara and Fess discuss what it means to 'be a man'. This is part of the transition phase of the rite, and the viewer sees how, with her guidance, Fess finds he can be an individual and make his own choices, something he needs to know in order to 'be a man'. The last phase of this is incorporation, and while we do not see a public ceremony introducing him as a man, we do see Fess asserting himself in the new role when he over-rides his father's orders to keep the space-ship grounded, thus allowing Jayne to once again escape his father's clutches.

Aspects of status are important to this episode from the very beginning. First, Simon's aspects of 'being proper', his explanations of his not swearing and his reaction to Kaylee's 'Have good sex' line starts off the episode, immediately cueing the viewer in that he is someone different from Kaylee. These verbal signifiers as well as the many visible ones run through the episode. These aspects can also be seen in visual signifiers, the dialog cueing the viewer in to some of them, like when Mal assesses Kaylee's suggestion to bring Simon along with them:

MAL

The management here don't take too kindly to sightseers. Which is why we're posing as buyers. And there isn't a one of us looks the part more than the good Doctor. (looks Simon over) I mean, the pretty fits, the soft hands, definitely a moneyed individual, all rich and lily-white, pasty all over--

SIMON

All right. Fine. I'll go. Just ... stop describing me.

In comparing such a description to those who ‘mine’ the clay, the ‘mudders’, are in muddy, coarse clothes which seem to be a jumble of styles, like their houses . The foreman and his crew of ‘prods’ can be picked out by the quantity of leather they wear, although they seem also somewhat muddy. Our final level of visual signifiers of status within this visited culture comes in seeing Inara’s meeting with Magistrate Higgins, whose clothes, house and manicured garden could make one think that this was taking place on another planet entirely. However, we can see how signifiers can be misconstrued as well, in examining Simon’s first interaction with Stitch. As Simon doesn’t know Stitch’s name, he uses ‘Sir’, a relatively formal term which Stitch interprets as a means of disrespecting or dismissing him. These aspects of what is proper vary, as can be seen in Simon explaining why his ‘rigidity’ when he’s around Kaylee is, as he puts it, actually his way of “showing you that I like you. I'm showing respect.” This is a good indication of how such differences can be used within a culture in order to keep social or regional groups separate. Likewise, within a social grouping we can see that Inara can invoke ‘proper rules of etiquette’ on Magistrate Higgins when she politely forces him out of her shuttle so that only she and Fess are in the Place of Union.

In looking to areas of communication, one of the obvious aspects is the prevalence of bi-lingualism. Given understandings of language families, linguistic thought and diffusion, when the two languages are recognized as English and Chinese (Mandarin), origins of the existant culture can be discussed as well as where elements of Chinese are used within the predominantly English-speaking population.¹ The use of vocal qualifiers can be seen in Simon’s sarcasm while dealing with Jayne in the infirmary, the seeming incredulity of his “Enemies? You? No! How can it be?” is so obviously overdone as to convey the message that he means just the opposite of what he is saying. These can be seen again, but with more emphasis on kinisetics in Kaylee’s “I said ... Things are going *well*” where she not only speaks slowly, but exaggerates the inclination of her head, with a final motion in Simon’s direction, but also keeps her eyes wide and her eyebrows raised as she talks directly to Mal, whose response of ‘Oh, *well*. Well ...” with a slight shift of his eyes toward Simon conveys the dawning revelation of the extra information that Kaylee is implying - that she and Simon are actually making some progress toward a relationship. And, there are places where information is conveyed just through looks or gestures. The instance where Mal suggests that they examine the operation before arranging an account and Simon questions, is an instance of communication via subtle facial gestures.

Of course, being of the Sci-Fi genre, the display of technology within and between the various cultures presents an interesting contrast. On one level we have spaceships that can undertake interplanetary travel as a regular occurrence and on the other we have a bar that is lit with many candles. This is an excellent place to look to the viability of certain forms of technology within different cultures and the locational

accesses due to status. Magistrate Higgins has the ability to use technology to contact a Companion on a spaceship and arrange for her to come and 'work' with his son. The foreman has some sort of vocal transmitter/amplifier that helps him to keep control and announce shift-changes. The mudders have none of these, and use the simplest of technologies because they do not have access to the items either economically or socially.

Only glancingly touched on, we can see some aspects of race relations apparent in the episode as well. We see no real stratification based on heritage within the mudders, who are comprised of many differing racial backgrounds, or even on the ship, noting that Zoe is second in command, and the religious specialist is Book, both of them played by non-caucasian actors. This is subtle, as is the fact that there seems to be no problem with the fact that Zoe and Wash are married. From what can be gleaned in this aspect, there seems to be a large amount of equality in both race and gender in these societies, however, this point could be debated. In examining the dynamics within this single episode, we see that the people in control tend to be male and of Western descent (some of this being due to the show being pointed toward a Western audience). Additionally, we don't know if there are male Companions or whether that is a gender-specific job. However, as much as there is a large amount of equality, we can see that there are some things that are gender-specific, such as having long hair. No one questions any of the females who have long hair, but both River and Zoe have strong reactions to seeing Book's hair loose, giving us a view that males should not have long hair.

The modes of expression seen in the show in terms of artistry can be viewed as both Folk Art and Fine Art. The mudders, as a whole have the realm of Folk Art, seen in the sculpting of Jayne's statue, obviously not the work of a professional, but a striking likeness of Jayne. In addition, we are also given a glimpse of this art being expressed musically and lyrically through 'The Ballad of Jayne', a simple song, in verse and refrain, allowing all the mudders in the bar to join in and take part, a community expression of feeling. The other side of this would be Inara's use of the 'Companion Greeting Ceremony' which appears to be akin to the Japanese tea ceremony. In order to perform this art, one needs knowledge and training, a form of Fine Art performed by a specialist.

Included in this examination of culture is food, or more accurately here, a drink. Jayne's exposition of 'Mudder's Milk' having 'all the vitamins, proteins, and carbs of your Grandma's best turkey dinner, plus fifteen-percent alcohol' and then Simon's tie to the ancient Egyptian's form of beer giving the viewer a real historical cultural analogy. Even better for Simon's description, it shows the physical and cultural functions of such a drink. In addition, we see the reactions of the crew to the drink when they first encounter it; a dramatic, near disgusted, reaction from Wash.

One of the interesting aspects of the entire show is the multiple points of view of a single event. Focusing on the action of Jayne's theft of the money from Magistrate Higgins, we can see several differing views. Where Jayne sees a failed opportunity, Stitch sees a betrayal, and the 'mudders' see a hero delivering them from an unfair

situation through an overly generous gift. Magistrate Higgins sees a theft and a personal affront to his power, while Fess sees someone with the power and backbone to stand up to his father. While the event only happens once, the worldviews of the observers and actors gives different perspectives and interpretation of the actions. This then helps to reinforce some perspectives, such as that of the ‘mudders’ that ‘Boss’ Higgins’ practices are unfair, or Stitch’s (and perhaps Mal’s) view that Jayne cannot be trusted. We can also note some of the differences in perceptions of how Jayne’s heroism is recognized by Simon, who compares it to the recognition he gets as a doctor: “You know, I’ve saved lives. Dozens. Maybe hundreds. I reattached a girl’s leg. Her whole leg. She named her hamster after me. I got a hamster. He drops a box of money, he gets a town.” Here, one sees exactly what Simon thinks is important, saving lives, while for the ‘mudders’, money is the important thing. This is an excellent lesson in how different groups perceive and remember events differently, based on their place in the culture and their cultural needs. One of the things that comes out of this is perhaps the idea that the rich have the luxury of valuing life more than the poor.

Some of this diversity is what ultimately leads to the cultural stability. The mudder Meadows, who takes the bullet for Jayne, even after hearing all of Stitch’s words, is displaying his belief in the mudder’s view of the theft event, willing to be a ‘hero’ like Jayne and become a martyr. One can see how well this makes an impression on the mudders as the mudder child reverently offers Jayne his knife back. This leads to the continuity of the interpretation of not only the initial event but subsequent ones, even Jayne toppling his own statue. This is alluded to in Mal and Jayne’s final exchange where Jayne voices that “They’re probably sticking that statue right back up”, and Mal responds “Ain’t about you, Jayne. About what they need.”

What then is it that the mudders need, and what does all this information culminate to? One thing we can easily see is the ‘Us/Them’ dichotomy of cultures. The crew is an ‘Us’, the mudders are an ‘Us’, and Jayne sort of straddles both in his hero status. The foreman and his prods are an ‘Us’. Magistrate Higgins and his son are an ‘Us’. By contrast, for each of these groups, they are making themselves an ‘Us’ in the face of a ‘Them’. For the crew, it’s all of the people on the planet, for the mudders, it’s Magistrate Higgins, the foreman and the prods, and that relationship goes the other way as well. While these groups share a number of common conceptions, they all have means in the varied aspects of culture to either ally themselves with one group or set themselves apart from another. All of these help to show how the groups use different elements of culture as boundary markers. Clothes, education, regional knowledge, access to technology, etiquette and language are all aspects of this greater scheme that really come out as signifiers of to what normative and physical areas one ‘belongs’.

Why choose Media like these?

What is the thread for all of these media choices? Well, as 'God' puts it in the final lines of *T.V. or Not To Be*, "I hate message shows". In using media for the teaching of anthropology, we are continually looking for examples that 'show' a message. In this way, mainstream media which has a message or theme which fits with showing some topic we are trying to teach is just as valid as a teaching tool as the real field footage. And since much of the mainstream media has such a short time-frame in which to get its message across, the impact or punch of such a show makes the message easier to recognize to the Western viewer.

This then, becomes the utility of such footage. For an introductory course, the nuances of the many cultural aspects that come together to create what we see in Chagnon's *Bride Service* or Heider's *Dani Sweet Potatoes* get lost in the mix. While these segments of field footage do have a theme, there are other, competing themes as the people involved go about their lives. Here we can see a clear-cut distinction, especially with the 22 minute long (half hour of air-time) mainstream shows, where the themes do not compete, and a fast pace from initiation to resolution is a must. Longer shows can afford to have a slower pacing, or multiple themes, which may or may not compete with each other, and some of which may also not have a resolution during the episode. This makes choosing a longer show a trickier exercise, as the theme(s) must be prevalent and distinct, the initiation and completion of the themed action must take place during the episode with enough exposition to make it viable for classroom use.

Part of the problem that we encounter in using our classic ethnographic media is that our students do not necessarily follow what we might term as a 'linear model of learning'. Podolefsky (1997) discusses how both he and his son attacked learning a computer program. Where Podolefsky read the manual (a linear methodology), his son loaded the program and started experimenting (a non-linear methodology). After an hour, Podolefsky was ready to start, armed with sufficient information to proceed and found his son "surfing through the program like he'd been using it for a month" (Podolefsky 1997:59). He uses this as an indication of how students might be better focused on a subject through more direct interaction with it than by just reading and lecture. If we are still versed in teaching in the way that we learned, we may still be missing the instructional means by which our students will actually learn. Bishop offers that *Dead Birds'* appearance on DVD will allow for some of this non-linear classroom integration (Bishop 2005:477), but is the simple change in media format going to be enough?

This is not to imply that mainstream media should be all we use. Take for example, the utility of showing some of the classic films of the Yanomamo when building to or during discussions of something like recent debates brought forward by the El Dorado task force. While allegations on ethical actions by anthropologists on

unfamiliar populations can seem rather hypothetical, by giving our students a number of faces and individuals who could have/may have been compromised. Such actions tend to make the situations more 'real' and 'human' in their consequences for the students. It also tends to make them more aware of the reality and gravity of anthropological study.

Students' Responses

Another important aspect of the choices we make is examining how students perceive the media items we show. While seldom, occasionally a student will approach with a question about 'what they were supposed to get out of the film'. This can be very discouraging when each movie is given context by the subject being discussed, an introduction, and hints about what to watch. The more usual response is that people get the general idea, but can get 'hung up' on some little detail that is perhaps more relevant to themselves. Take for example, Chagnon's *The Feast*, where two Yanomamo villages are negotiating an alliance. It seems that female students are more interested in where the females at the feast go, as the film focuses on the men's activities. Another good example comes from Chagnon's *Bride Service* where many students get stuck on the fact that the newest wife of the father-in-law is only ten years old, rather than noting the dynamics of the exchange.

Even when students do not get 'hung up' on something, it seems that often the films are similar enough that they blend together in the minds of the students. In examining how the *Jaynestown* episode of *Firefly* sizes up, students tend to not pick up on everything, but they pick up on the major themes. They also tend to remember it better, given the distinct storylines. And given that the situations and characters seem to be, at some level, more recognizable, the students find a character they identify with, or an aspect (or aspects) that interests them more than others. This combination of both the identification with a character and the storyline, as well as the pacing, seems to make *Jaynestown* more memorable for students than *Dead Birds*, even though the latter has more time devoted to fewer named characters and is pieced into several 'day-in-the-life' storylines.

This leads into another aspect of the use of the modern television show, in that the show tends to be more engaging. More students remember the examples of the concepts, and, even better perhaps is that they force students to recognize the concepts within their own world. This seems to work through recognizing the cultural concepts in their entertainment, then into their own real-world dealings, as examples from the *Jaynestown* episode often show up in short answer and essay questions on tests. As Kluckhohn put forth in his emphasis about anthropology, this episode "*holds up a great mirror to man and lets him look at himself in his ... variety*" (Kluckhohn 1944:16).

And, perhaps lastly, one of the things that comes up is that students seem to be more comfortable in asking more complex questions about the cultural interplay. This is likely to be because they already have a fairly firm basis in the culture portrayed by the show. In our classic media, even with background readings and introductory preparations from us, students seem to not get all that they might from the media, and seem intimidated about asking questions. As we cannot necessarily cover every question they might have as we discuss the movie, their asking is obviously very important to their understanding, helping to give them a better grasp on the cultural examples in the media.

In surveying sixty Buffalo State College students (over several years) who viewed all the different media discussed (Table 2), the programs they would suggest the most highly to other students and kept their interest best were Jaynestown and The Longest Weekend. The next most highly rated in these two categories were A Man Called Bee, Dead Birds, Of Flesh and Steel, and The Feast. Of these, Of Flesh and Steel was rated the most clear in displaying its concept, and of the other three, The Feast was rated as more understood than A Man Called Bee and Dead Birds. Perhaps of note in this survey is that Mirror, Mirror rated the same as A Man Called Bee and Dead Birds in terms of keeping students' interest and clarity of displaying its content, but very poorly in terms of students recommending it to other students as a good aid toward showing the concept, perhaps because of its pacing compared with the more modern media it was up against.

It is also interesting to note that older students (> 30 years) generally preferred the more traditional ethnographic media, such as A Man Called Bee and Dead Birds, whereas younger students, which made up the bulk of the survey data (Average age 26, Range 17-62), tended to prefer the 'Hollywood' media, such as Jaynestown and The Longest Weekend. It seems that the younger students generally found the traditional ethnographic data to be too slowly paced, though this bias is minor in the aggregate numbers when looking at the 'too quickly'/'too slowly' survey answers.

Conclusion:

In the face of attempting to pass the information of how to recognize aspects of culture to a student who is, in some ways, assaulted with 'short attention span' media, the best way to do this is to 'fight fire with fire'. By finding ways to use this media to our advantage, we can not only capture their attentions, but also their minds. If we are to actually convey our information, then we must use a means compatible with our student's means of comprehending, even if our traditional media does not always fit this bill. A careful blend of both mainstream media and ethnographic media can aid in getting our message across.

Some of the utility of such mainstream media in the classroom is the fact that most, if not all of it, takes place in our real world, although settings and situations may be

at times outlandish. An important aspect of real-world settings for the cultural mechanisms hits on one of the fundamentals that Tylor discussed about the universality of culture; “That a whole nation should have a special dress, special tools and special weapons, special laws of marriage and property, special moral and religious doctrines is a remarkable fact, which we notice so little because we have lived all our lives in the midst of it.” (Tylor in Bee 1988:70). This sort of ‘real-life’ experience (as much as one can get from contemporary television) is, in a sense, the real understanding of anthropological theory. Even as we use such examples as the Dani and the Yanomamo, and they serve to illustrate our examples, they don’t often ‘hit home’ with our students who may see them as remote in spatial, temporal or even cultural ways. Perhaps then, we can truly convey the important concepts behind an anthropological worldview that they can use in their lives after the final exam, rather than merely remembering some trivial fact about some other culture as the lasting effect of our Introductory Class.

Thus, by introducing our students to elements of culture through the mainstream media, they have a better chance of picking up on the similar nuances and functionalities, so that when they are exposed to the classic ethnographic work, they are that much better equipped to see the differing actions and functionalities. This then, should aid them in recognizing not only the culture all around them, but also that the culture of the ‘other’ perhaps isn’t so foreign after all. Thus allowing the students, as Kottak puts it, “by looking at people in other cultures [to] learn more about ourselves” (Kottak 1997b:19).

¹ Of course, the show was designed for a Western audience, and it can be seen, if translations are examined, that the Mandarin is used occasionally for exclamations that the audience should recognize due to their context, but also as a means of getting around the censors. An example is when the bartender bats the bottle of ‘mudder’s milk’ of Jayne’s hand and exclaims “The hero of Canton won’t be drinking that *shiong mao niao*.” A literal translation of the Mandarin is ‘panda urine’.

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1999 Alan Caldwell, dir., 30 min., Adelaide Productions Inc.

Star Trek: Mirror, Mirror (Episode 2.4)

1967 Marc Daniels, dir., 50 minutes, Desilu Productions/Paramount TV

	<i>Cultural Anthropology</i> , Ferraro	<i>Cultural Anthropology</i> , Harris & Johnson	<i>Cultural Anthropology</i> , Haviland, Prins, Walrath & McBride	<i>Cultural Anthropology</i> , Miller	<i>Cultural Anthropology</i> , Nanda & Warms	<i>Cultural Anthropology</i> , Schultz & Lavenda	Counts
Applied Anthropology	X	X	X				3
Culture	X	X	X	X	X	X	6
Culture Change	X		X	X	X		4
Economics	X	X	X	X	X	X	6
Enculturation/ Cognitive Map		X	X	X	X	X	5
Family/ Domestic Groups	X	X	X	X	X	X	6
Gender	X	X	X	X	X	X	6
Human Evolution		X	X		X		3
Intro/ Phys/ Arch/ Ling/ Cult	X	X	X	X	X	X	6
Kinship	X	X	X	X	X	X	6
Language/ Communication	X	X	X	X	X	X	6
Marriage	X	X	X	X	X	X	6
Medicine/ Healing		X		X			2
Methods/ Fieldwork	X	X	X	X		X	5
Migration				X			1
Political Organization	X	X	X	X	X	X	6
Race/ Ethnicity		X			X	X	3
Religion/ Supernatural World	X	X	X	X	X	X	6
Reproduction		X		X		X	3
Social Order/ Stratification	X	X	X	X	X	X	6
Subsistence	X	X	X	X	X	X	6
The Arts	X	X	X	X	X	X	6
Theory	X			X			2

Table 1. A survey of topics within six introductory texts for Cultural Anthropology.

	Arrow Game		Of Flesh and Steel		The Feast		The Longest Weekend	
	AVG	M	AVG	M	AVG	M	AVG	M
1) The film kept your interest?	2.5	3	2	2	2.2	2	2	1
2) The film was clear in displaying the concept?	2.3	2	2.2	1	2.3	2	2.2	2
3) The film moved too quickly?	3.8	4	3.6	3	3.5	4	3.6	4
4) The film moved too slowly?	3.1	3	3.7	3	3	3	3.7	4
5) You didn't understand the film?	4.1	5	4	5	4.1	5	3.7	5
6) You would recommend this film to students looking to understand the concept?	2.3	2	2	2	2.1	2	2	1

	A Man Called Bee		Dead Birds		Jaynestown		Mirror,Mirror	
	AVG	M	AVG	M	AVG	M	AVG	M
1) The film kept your interest?	2.3	2	2.4	2	1.6	1	2.9	2
2) The film was clear in displaying the concept?	2.2	2	2.3	2	2	2	2.7	2
3) The film moved too quickly?	3.8	4	3.7	4	3.3	4	4.1	5
4) The film moved too slowly?	3.2	3	3	3	3.9	4	3.4	5
5) You didn't understand the film?	3.9	4	3.7	4	3.9	5	3.8	4
6) You would recommend this film to students looking to understand the concept?	2.1	2	2.4	2	1.8	1	3.2	4

Key:

- 1 = Agree Strongly
- 2 = Agree
- 3 = Neutral/Undecided
- 4 = Disagree
- 5 = Disagree Strongly

Table 2. Results of a survey of sixty undergraduate students after viewing all media. Average Rating and Mode presented to represent survey data