

Syllabus

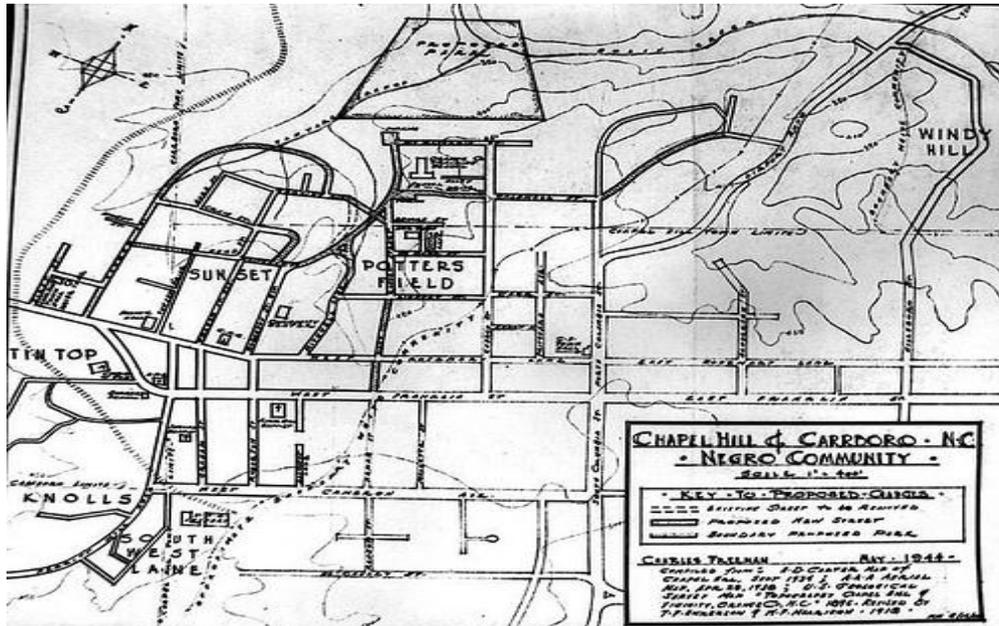
Communication Studies 668H: The Ethnographic (Re)Turn Spring 2011 T/Th 9:30

Prof. Della Pollock

Bingham 212

Office hours: T 11-12:30 campus, T 1-4 Jackson Center, and by appointment

pollock@email.unc.edu



Course description

In this course we will be learning the history, ethics, and methods--and developing the community relationships--necessary to contribute to the “Northside Partnership”: an ongoing collaboration between the university, United with the Northside Community Now (UNC NOW) and the Marian Cheek Jackson Center for Saving and Making History located in St. Joseph C.M.E. on Rosemary. Our focus will be the MCJ Center’s multi-layered project, *Histories of Homes*. The project is concerned with discerning and addressing rapid economic development and changing demographics in a network of historically African-American, low-income neighborhoods. We will aim to add significant oral histories, multi-media documentary, support for community-based initiatives (community lawyering, strategic planning) and data analysis to the project as we continue to criss-cross university and community borders.

This is a service-learning and experiential education course. We will be *learning by doing*. While we will meet regularly on campus, our primary classrooms will be the St. Joseph sanctuary and H.W. Baldwin fellowship hall, the Northside neighborhood, and local community centers. Our primary teachers and partners will be member-participants in the Northside community which we will approach as a community of investment rather than, say, of place and so inclusive of all who work, serve, worship, play, live and *remember* there

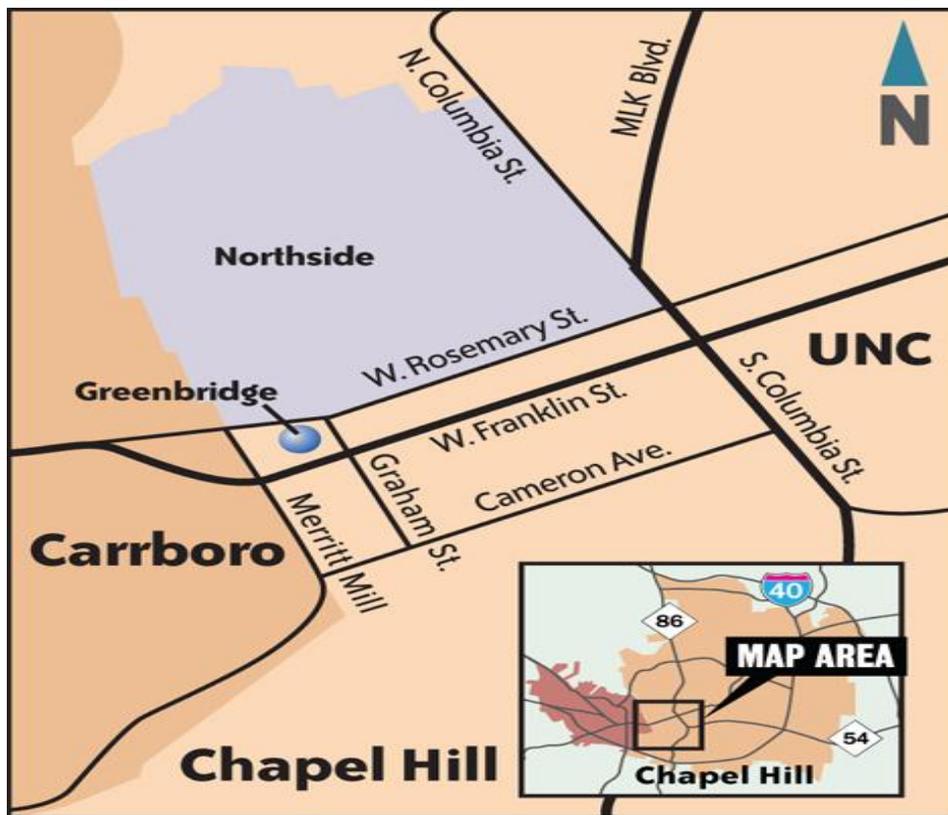
Methodological premises and general aims

The past twenty years have seen a revolution in what it means to study and represent culture or *ethnography*. The turn in ethnography has been a turn to questions of representation: Is the scholar a neutral reporter? What are the ethics and logics of representing so-called “others”? Who is the author of culture and who has the authority to tell it? A turn across the disciplines to ethnography has consequently been a turn towards the possibilities of representation: How can scholar-ethnographers participate in history- and culture-making “from the ground up”? How can he/she effectively and ethically “share” authority with primary culture-makers? How might his/her work consequently be entailed in a politics of diversity and alternative democracies? When then is a scholar of culture a cultural worker? What are the resources of representation available to him or her in the work of advancing the perspectives of those in diverse cultural locations?

The turn *in* ethnography (away from presumptions of objectivity and a clear division between the researcher and the researched) and the turn *towards* ethnography (as an opportunity for alternative and heightened forms of representation) yield a third turn: a sense of ethical responsibility to make a significant *return* to the field, to the social and cultural matrices in which the ethnographer has been privileged to learn *with* co-participants. The “new” ethnography positions the ethnographer in a horizontal relationship with experts on their own histories, cultures, communities of place and interest. The ethnographer is consequently first a student and listener and secondly then a collaborator in making historical, cultural, and social knowledge. As students and listeners, we become social *actors*, whose learning implicates us in the course of the social dramas we study. Accordingly we have to ask: What will we *do* with what we know and/or with what we have come to *unknow* about ourselves, our world, and, in the case of this course, our home?



Hence, in this class we will particularly be concerned with possibilities for *ethnographic return* in the context of economic and community development. Our primary method will be *ethnographic oral history*—interview-conversations supported by intensive immersion in the world of interview-partners.



History of the course

This course had its first start in 2001 in another course project dedicated to learning the history of desegregation in Chapel Hill. When approached for local support, Ed Caldwell Jr., then President of the Lincoln High School Alumni Association (Lincoln High was the all-black high school in town) replied: “y’all have studied the hell out of the black community and given nothing back!” Ed’s response gave rise to a series of service-learning courses dedicated to learning more about the role of the black church in the wake of desegregation through oral history and performance. Students in one episode of that course felt their commitment to an emerging Northside partnership overflow the bounds of a single semester. Together, we had pursued deep listening and service-learning with members of St. Joseph C.M.E. and gained a strong sense of what Kelly Oliver calls “response-ability”: the power AND the obligation to honor field relationships with action. Out of their interest grew the first version of COMM 669. During that spring semester “sequel,” the students established United with the Northside Community Now, an organization dedicated to social equity and community development in the Northside and affiliated communities. UNC NOW quickly became a community collaborative with co-leadership by clerical leaders, heads of local non-profits, and community members from within and well beyond St. Joseph. UNC NOW built teams to support the burgeoning food ministry (which, in collaboration, became “Heavenly Groceries/ Comida Celestial”) through pick-up and distribution and Spanish language translation/mediation; sponsored S.O.S. (Sustaining OurSelves) community meetings; developed local health initiatives; and, among other things, helped to establish the one-of-a-kind Marian Cheek Jackson Center for Saving and Making History in 2009 (www.jacksoncenter.info). Establishing the center involved completely refurbishing the upstairs of St. Joseph, developing oral history databases linked with the Southern Oral History Program and Southern Historical Collection, serving as co-PIs on grants to develop a youth internship program, creating performances, multi-media installations, and community festivals, and

continuing—perhaps most importantly—to listen and to listen again to the wide range of people and histories that make up the “Northside.”

The “Histories of Homes” project is phase II of a 3-year plan for *Facing Our Neighbors*, which began in 2010 with a major exploration, documentary installation, and celebration of local neighborhoods, supported by the Town of Chapel Hill Public Arts Commission and the North Carolina Humanities Council. (Photographic and audio portions of the *Facing Our Neighbors* exhibit can still be experienced at the Jackson Center.) The “Histories of Homes” portion of the project will focus on

- the material history of houses that don’t typically meet criteria for historic preservation
- changing patterns of ownership, rental, temporary shelter, and “land trust” housing in the Northside
- the cultural life of home and family (and foodways!) in relation to school, church, and business/labor
- the place of distinct oral histories within the larger history of the Northside and of communities across the state and nation sited for economic development

One of the biggest problems university members face in working with both local/global and global/local communities is the “come and go” effect: arriving on the scene with great intentions and diligence and then disappearing into other scholarly or even service endeavors. This course is structured as a collaborative project at least in part to *sustain* the flow of student participation in the Northside partnership. In other words, each student in this class is a key part in continuing the life of a project that was begun in 2005 and that will continue long past his/her time at the university. Note that many students have remained connected to this project through independent initiatives, UNC NOW, service contributions, community life, and leadership in the Jackson Center—whether while still in school or after graduation. You may wish to continue to build field relationships or to develop emerging opportunities (possibly as part of another course). For now, however, each student is in the challenging but thrilling position to pick up where someone else left off and to leave a legacy of action and potential in turn.



Basic course aims

- To practice *engaged scholarship*
- through service, ethnography, and oral history
- in order to understand complex *histories of homes* in the Northside
- and to make a significant contribution to *assets-based community development*
- as part of ongoing collaboration with community members and organizations.



Course expectations and principles

Get ready. We will be studying and participating in dynamic change processes, even insofar as we will be approaching culture as not fixed or stable but always already *in the process of becoming itself*. While the course readings, meetings, and assignments provide a shared structure for our work, encounters and outcomes will be relatively unpredictable. It may be necessary occasionally to drop everything and address what seem initially to be a small issue or to delay scheduled assignments in order to accommodate emerging events. Effective participation in this class will consequently require you to adopt an ethical/methodological stance that includes:

- openness to radical, intimate difference*
- tolerance for changing tacks and going “off course”*
- love of serendipity*
- focus, and determination AND “soft” control or being very OK with “we’ll see what happens”*
- desire to learn and serve beyond assigned hours*
- occasionally excessive enthusiasm (!)*
- trustworthy respect for all university and community partners*
- a strong sense of the gifts and resources you have to offer*
- willingness to be changed by what you see, hear, and do*

Because the course/field-work requires us to be *flexible and co-creative world actors*, students may feel a tension between the usual structure and expectations of a university semester and the timeframes, practices, and expectations of field partners. Accordingly:

- Do not try to make the field “fit” course assignments. Rather, make assignments fit your discoveries and adapt to your emerging sense of purpose or commitment.
- Integrate dimensions of the course on daily basis. Keep a *working log* of activities, encounters, issues, reflections. Record and explore events before they fly by.
- Raise questions, concerns, and discoveries with the class and/or the instructor as immediately and as forthrightly as possible. Abandon all hope about asking the “right” question, all worry about doing something “wrong”: all questions are *good* and there is no better time to ask than *now*.

- *Be there.* There is simply no substitute for participation in worship services, the food ministry, talk on the steps of St. Joseph, Neighborhood Watch or Town Council meetings, in the Jackson Center, at fellowship events (some of which you may learn about at the next-to-last-minute!), etc. We all have competing schedules and agendas; consider this *a practice in presence*. Some questions can only be answered on-site, in exchange, over time. *Be there.*
- If you find yourself confused, resistant, overwhelmed, or distressed, try to avoid rushing to judgment or to try to resolve what seems to be the “problem.” Instead, ask yourself: what’s *interesting* here? What’s worth being curious about? Are there opportunities here that my wishes and plans are keeping me from seeing? What questions can I ask field partners, however awkward that may feel? In what new ways might I listen in order to find fresh ways to approach the situation?

Course texts

Dwight Conquergood, “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 46.2 (2002): 145-156. (pdf)

Dwight Conquergood, “Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Poetics,” *Handbook of Performance Studies*, ed. Madison and Hamera (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), pp. 350-365. (pdf)

John Ehle, *The Free Men* (Lewisville, NC: Press 53, 1965/2007).

Gary Paul Green and Anna Haines, “Social Capital,” *Asset Building and Community Development* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), pp. 109-122. (pdf)

Barbara Myerhoff, “Stories as Equipment for Living,” “Telling One’s Story,” *Stories as Equipment for Living*, ed. Marc Kaminsky and Mark Weiss (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), pp. 17-59. (pdf)

Della Pollock, “Moving Histories: Performance and Oral History,” *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*, ed. Davis (Cambridge UP, 2008), pp. 120-135) (pdf).

Hugo Slim and Paul Thompson, *Listening for a Change: Oral Testimony and Community Development* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1995) (coursepack)

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/>, Documenting the American South, Southern Historical Collection, UNC

Selections and handouts as indicated; additional resources as needed!

Course requirements

| | |
|---|-----|
| Participation | 30% |
| Per the “course expectations and principles” outlined above, including <i>working log</i> | |
| Readings, discussion, in-class assignments and exercises prepared with thoroughness and integrity | |
| Shared worship, event support, general fellowship at St. Joseph and in the Northside | |
| Regular participation in various service opportunities and/or initiatives | |
| Project development | 30% |
| Planning, research, and dedicated follow-up for interview-conversations | |
| Appropriate check-out and return of equipment | |

- Appropriate interaction with collaborating course staff (see below)
- Interview log and deposit with both the Jackson Center and interview-partner
- Project statement: summary of nature, aims, plans and preparation
- 3 short *analytic reflection* papers (see questions on the course schedule) correlating project development with service-learning
- Final paper, presentation, portfolio (description forthcoming), including community contribution 30%
- Additional, independent contributions (graphic design, template for future action, technical support, etc.) 10%

Collaborating course staff

Lily Smith, co-head UNC NOW

smithls@email.unc.edu

Alison Kibbe, co-head UNC NOW

alisonkibbe@gmail.com

Aleck Stephens, Assoc. Dir, Jackson Center

ams.unc@gmail.com

C.J. Suitt, Assoc. Dir., Jackson Center

csuitt05@gmail.com

Rob Stephens, Assoc. Dir., Jackson Center

robstephens50@gmail.com

Hudson Vaughan, Assoc. Dir., Jackson Center

hudson.vaughan@gmail.com

Gladys Pendergraph, Assoc. Dir., Jackson Center and head of “Heavenly Groceries”

gladyspendergraph@gmail.com

919-967-6343

