

History 365: Fiction and Historical Imagination  
Modern Tales of Primitive Culture  
Fall Semester, 2019

315 Gregory Hall  
MWF 11:00–11:50 a.m.

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300B Gregory Hall  
MW 12:00–12:50 p.m. and by appointment

### Course Description and Objectives

In *A Discourse on Inequality* (1755), Jean-Jacques Rousseau declared that social progress had destroyed natural freedom. Rousseau named property and justice the dark wellsprings of social inequality and exploitation. The famous critic of progress thought that if we would just return to the cultural pathways of the virtuous peasant, then we could recover a world more moral and free. What if, as Rousseau believed, things have not gotten better across the great span of human history, but rather worse? Rousseau had his oddities to be sure, but the skepticism that nurtured his primitivist sensibility was not one of them. Many would come to share his mistrust of historical progress, if not his knack for articulation. Indeed, primitivism—the belief that the advance of civilization has been detrimental to human flourishing—was riddled throughout what we call western modernity. This course investigates the historical and intellectual dimensions of some of the tales that moderns told about supposedly primitive cultures.

“Modern Tales of Primitive Culture” examines primitivist literature from Europe and the Caribbean written between 1885 and 1955. We will access works written by Friedrich Nietzsche, Joseph Conrad, Sigmund Freud, D. H. Lawrence, Georges Bataille, and Aimé Césaire. Course readings creatively blend empirical and fictional accounts and include novels, memoirs, poems, dialogues, and imaginative essays. Across six two-week parts, we will consider the vexed relationship between the primitive and another idea deeply rooted in modern thought—progress. Since at least 1750, European historical consciousness was dominated by the optimistic belief that the human condition was steadily improving. Primitivists, however, thought otherwise. They argued for returning to what was earliest, simplest, and most direct in human culture—or at least what they believed to be so. For them, primitive was not a pejorative but a potent word of praise. Of course, there was no consensus on what was really primitive, and primitive cultures were found everywhere, in primal hordes and Paleolithic hunters, pre-Socratic Greeks and pre-Columbian Mesoamericans, diasporic Africans and sheltered Tahitians. Primitivist authors, then, spent a lot of time uncovering and venerating evidence of remote ages and distant nations. They scoured histories of magic, myth, and religion; they poured over records written by travelers, ethnographers, and archaeologists; they even probed the archaic depths of the human psyche.

The word “primitive” was used to designate the peoples and cultures of archaic societies and prehistoric eras. “Primitive” was also used to describe contemporaneous peoples and cultural patterns found in certain areas of Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas. These so-called primitive cultures were often defined by what they lacked: industrial technology, technical

literacy, material accumulation, and a long history of social development. Primitivists argued that this lack was more than offset by an abundance of untamed freedom, sensual acuity, and social cohesion. Thus, primitivists often celebrated the moral worlds of primitive cultures and sought to reanimate the remnants of their ways of life. As we explore how the category primitive was used to make sense of the bright spectrum of human cultures, we will pay close attention to themes like morality, sexuality, ethnicity, and violence that were so important to understanding the foundations of human culture. We will also consider what this earlier primitivist sensibility tells us about our own rhetoric of a crisis of civilization and our own longing for a bygone era of sustainable well-being.

Class discussions will emphasize how primitivist tales related to the contexts of colonial expansion and perceived cultural superiority. On the international scene, the rapid expansion of colonial empires prompted a wider questioning of European values and virtues. But this came slowly: it was still possible in the late 1890s to speak with eloquence and passion about the gravity of Europe's civilizing mission. It was only well after the Second World War that Europe's global primacy was threatened on all sides. So much is familiar to any student of the period. What is less readily apparent is the extent to which the historical consciousness that pervaded the period was tempered by a belief that much of the era's rapid progress was in fact an accelerated fall from grace. Where most saw a straightforward advance from barbarism to the light of reason, liberty and equality, primitivists saw an overripe civilization and a long history of cultural decline. More than ever before, European intellectuals elaborated on primitive cultures in order to gain a deeper vision of humankind and to glimpse what modern society had lost.

The first objective of this upper division history course is to understand a specific piece of the past: how modern tales of primitive cultures shaped a unique historical imagination. The second objective is to demonstrate the value of adventurous books, big ideas, and the historical humanities. "Modern Tales of Primitive Culture" achieves these objectives by emphasizing active discussion of assigned readings and critical analysis of textual sources. The aim is to sharpen students' oral expression and written analysis. In three papers, students will identify a work's major arguments, evidence, and assumptions; state its narrative structure and mode of historical imagination; and draw connections between readings by comparing across genres. To this end, students will also prepare a short presentation and class discussion that pairs the visual arts with one of our course readings.

### **Assigned Readings**

Five books are required for the course. They are available for purchase at the Illini Union Bookstore. All other course readings are available through the course's Compass website, which can be found at: <https://compass2g.illinois.edu>

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo* (Vintage, 1989)

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness and Other Tales* (Oxford, 2002)

Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1990)

Georges Bataille, *The Cradle of Humanity* (Zone Books, 2009)

Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* (Wesleyan, 2001)

## **Course Requirements and Grade Distribution**

Participation: 20% of course grade

Attendance is required. For each class meeting, complete the assigned readings before class and bring a copy of the reading and any notes you have made to class. You are expected to participate in class discussions throughout the semester.

Two Short Papers: 40% of course grade (20% each)

For the first paper, you will write on Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* or Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. This paper is due in class on Monday, October 21. In the second paper, you will analyze Freud's *Totem and Taboo* or Lawrence's writings on the North American Southwest. The second paper is due in class on Monday, November 18. These papers should be between five to seven double-spaced pages. More detailed instructions and prompts will be distributed ahead of the papers' due dates. These papers are designed to evaluate the quality of your engagement with the course readings and class lectures. Your success in this course is important to me, and I encourage you to speak with me regarding paper ideas, outlines, and drafts.

Presentation: 20% of course grade

You will prepare a short presentation and class discussion that pairs the visual arts with one of our course readings. For example, you might compare Jean Dubuffet's *art brut* to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* or you might decide to show the affinities between any number of surrealist works and Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*. During our discussion of Denis Diderot's "Supplement to the Voyage of Bougainville," I will compare Diderot's dialogue to the paintings of Paul Gauguin and demonstrate what is required in these presentations. At that time, I will also provide more detailed instructions and a list of possible reading-artwork pairings.

Final Paper: 20% of course grade

You will write a final paper comparing a novelist's vision of Paleolithic culture (Georges Bataille's *The Cradle of Humanity*) with a negritudist's account of Antillean culture (Aimé Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*). More detailed instructions will be distributed before the paper's due date. I encourage you to speak with me regarding paper ideas, outlines, and drafts. The paper should be between six to eight double-spaced pages and is due no later than 5:00 pm on Friday, December 20.

## **Academic Integrity**

As with all your courses at the University of Illinois, you are required to adhere to the University's policy on academic integrity. This policy is described in detail at: [http://studentcode.illinois.edu/article1\\_part4\\_1-401.html](http://studentcode.illinois.edu/article1_part4_1-401.html)

## Accommodation and Disabilities

The University of Illinois provides reasonable accommodations to students with documented physical and learning disabilities. The Division of Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES), located at 1207 S. Oak St., Champaign, IL 61820, coordinates all documentation and accommodation of disabilities. The DRES telephone number is (217) 333-4603 and their website can be found at: <http://disability.illinois.edu>

## Course Schedule

This course schedule may change. Students will be notified of any changes in class. NB. Readings marked with an \* are available on our course Compass website.

### Introducing the Primitivist Sensibility

M August 26	<b>Syllabus</b>
W August 28	* Denis Diderot, "Supplement to the Voyage of Bougainville," 35-41
F August 30	* Denis Diderot, "Supplement to the Voyage of Bougainville," 41-7
M September 2	<b>No Class Meeting:</b> Labor Day
W September 4	* Denis Diderot, "Supplement to the Voyage of Bougainville," 47-65
F September 6	* Denis Diderot, "Supplement to the Voyage of Bougainville," 66-75 <b>Presentation Instructions for Presentations</b>

### Part One: An Ancient Morality Rekindled

M September 9	Friedrich Nietzsche, "Why I Am So Clever," <i>Ecce Homo</i> , 236-45 (§ 1-3), 252-8 (§ 8-10) Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>Human, All Too Human</i> , 167-8 (§ 45) * Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>The Gay Science</i> , 283-5 (§ 345) * Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> , 204-8 (§ 260) Friedrich Nietzsche, "Preface," <i>Genealogy of Morals</i> , 15-23 (§ 1- 8) Friedrich Nietzsche, "Genealogy of Morals," <i>Ecce Homo</i> , 312-13
W September 11	Friedrich Nietzsche, "First Essay," <i>Genealogy of Morals</i> , 24-56 (§ 1-17)
F September 13	Friedrich Nietzsche, "Second Essay," <i>Genealogy of Morals</i> , 57-83 (§ 1-15)

- M September 16 Friedrich Nietzsche, "Second Essay," *Genealogy of Morals*, 84–96 (§ 16–25)
- W September 18 Friedrich Nietzsche, "Third Essay," *Genealogy of Morals*, 96–163 (§ 1–28)
- F September 20 Friedrich Nietzsche, "Preface," *Ecce Homo*, 215–20 (§ 1–4)  
 \* Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 195–200, 245–54  
**Presentation**

### Part Two: Piercing the Porous Bounds of the Savage and the Civilized

- M September 23 Joseph Conrad, "An Outpost of Progress," *Heart of Darkness and Other Tales*, 1–25  
 \* Joseph Conrad, "My Best Story and Why I Think So," *Congo Diary*, 82–3  
 \* Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden"
- W September 25 Joseph Conrad, "Part I," *Heart of Darkness*, 103–33
- F September 27 Joseph Conrad, "Part II," *Heart of Darkness*, 134–60
- M Sept 30 \* Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa," *The Massachusetts Review* 18/4 (1977), 782–94  
 \* Cedric Watts, "'A Bloody Racist': About Achebe's View of Conrad," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 13 (1983), 196–209
- W October 2 Joseph Conrad, "Part III," *Heart of Darkness*, 161–87
- F October 4 **Presentation**  
**Instructions for First Paper**

### Part Three: Gathered Around the First Fires of Human Culture

- M October 7 \* Sigmund Freud, "An Autobiographical Study," 3–41
- W October 9 Sigmund Freud, "The Horror of Incest," *Totem and Taboo*, 3–23
- F October 11 Sigmund Freud, "The Return of Totemism in Childhood," *Totem and Taboo*, 125–73
- M October 14 \* James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, xxv–xxvii, 3–6, 283–98, 648–51

W October 16 Sigmund Freud, "The Return of Totemism in Childhood," *Totem and Taboo*, 174–200

F October 18 \* Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 77–88  
**Presentation**

#### Part Four: Reviving the Indigenous Cultures of the North American Southwest

M October 21 \* D. H. Lawrence, "America, Listen to Your Own," *The New Republic* 315 (1920), 68–70  
\* Walter Lippman, "The Crude Barbarian and the Noble Savage," *The New Republic* 315 (1920), 70–1  
\* Mary Austin and Walter Lippman, "Mrs. Austin Protests" and "Mr. Lippman Answers," *The New Republic* 318 (1921), 170  
**First Paper Due**

W October 23 \* D. H. Lawrence, "The Woman Who Rode Away," 5–37

F October 25 \* D. H. Lawrence, "Corasmin and the Parrots," *Mornings in Mexico*, 9–23  
\* D. H. Lawrence, "Paris Letter," 119–22  
\* D. H. Lawrence, "Dear Old Horse, A London Letter," 137–9

M October 28 \* D. H. Lawrence, "The Spirit of Place," *Studies in Classic American Literature*, 11–18  
\* D. H. Lawrence, "Taos," 100–3  
\* C. Jung, "The Pueblo Indians," *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 246–53

W October 30 \* D. H. Lawrence, "Marriage by Quetzalcoatl," *The Plumed Serpent*, 327–54  
\* Simone de Beauvoir, "D. H. Lawrence or Phallic Pride," *The Second Sex*, 229–37

F November 1 \* D. H. Lawrence, "New Mexico," 141–7  
**Presentation**  
**Instructions for Second Paper**

#### Part Five: The Birth of the Sacred in Southwestern France

M November 4 Georges Bataille, "Unlivable Earth?," *The Cradle of Humanity*, 175–8  
Georges Bataille, "A Visit to Lascaux," *The Cradle of Humanity*, 47–55  
Georges Bataille, "A Meeting in Lascaux," *The Cradle of Humanity*, 81–5

W November 6 Werner Herzog, *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (in-class screening)

- F November 8 \* Werner Herzog and Samuel Wigley, "Out of the Darkness" *Sight & Sound* 21/4 (2011), 28–30  
 \* Werner Herzog and Jascha Hoffman, "Illuminating the Dark" *Nature* 473 (2011), 30  
**Presentation**
- M November 11 \* Georges Bataille, *Lascaux*, 11–15, 34–9, 47–50, 125–30
- W November 13 Georges Bataille, "Notes for a Film," *The Cradle of Humanity*, 179–85  
 Georges Bataille, "Lecture, January 18, 1955," *The Cradle of Humanity*, 87–104
- F November 15 Georges Bataille, "The Cradle of Humanity," *The Cradle of Humanity*, 143–73

#### Part Six: Resurrecting Older Wisdoms and Organic Progress in the Francophone Antilles

- M November 18 André Breton, "A Great Black Poet," *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, ix–xix  
 Annette Smith, "A Note on André Breton," *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, vii–viii  
 \* Jean-Paul Sartre, "Black Orpheus," *The Massachusetts Review* 6/1 (1964–5), 13–52  
**Second Paper Due**
- W November 20 \* Aimé Césaire, "Culture and Colonization," *Social Text* 28/2 (2010), 127–44  
 \* Léopold Sédar Senghor, "The Spirit of Civilization," *Présence Africaine* (1956), 51–64
- F November 22 Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, 1–19
- November 25–9 **No Class Meeting:** Fall Break
- M December 2 Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, 19–39
- W December 4 Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, 39–51  
 \* Aimé Césaire, "Poetry and Knowledge," xlii–lvi
- F December 6 \* Aimé Césaire, "Letter to Maurice Thorez," *Social Text* 28/2 (2010), 145–52  
 \* Aimé Césaire and Charles H. Rowell, "It Is Through Poetry That One Copes With Solitude," *Callaloo* 38 (1989), 49–67  
**Presentation**  
**Instructions for Final Paper**

M December 9      Course Wrap-up

W December 11      **No Class Meeting:** You might use this time to draft your final paper.

F December 20      **Final Paper Due:** Your final paper is due no later than 5:00 p.m. on Friday, December 20. Please e-mail your paper to me as an attached Microsoft Word document at rallen11@illinois.edu