Social and Symbolic Archaeology
Professor Randall White

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The waning dominance of ecological paradigms in archaeology has been accompanied by a new theoretical and methodological concern for social and symbolic aspects of ancient cultures. Over the past two decades this newfound emphasis has revolutionized our knowledge of prehistoric social and symbolic systems around the world. In the wake of these changes, this course explores archaeology's newly emerging ability to address social and symbolic aspects of prehistoric culture.

Initially, three weeks of readings and discussion will emphasize theoretical and methodological concerns. These will be followed by a multi-week, comprehensive overview of the Paleolithic record for burial practices, personal adornment and graphic/plastic representation. In addition to issues of chronological and temporal variation, there will be a definite emphasis on methodological and interpretive frontiers, and evolutionary trends.

The remainder of the course will be organized into a series of rich, student-presented modules. These case studies are expected to be detailed and comprehensive and well-illustrated using Powerpoint. Cultural regions include the Americas, Sub-Saharan Africa, Australia, and Siberia/Alaska. Students will be responsible for assigning readings to accompany their presentation.