

SIS-680.A01 • Summer 2009

P. T. Jackson

Ethnographic Fieldnoting Exercise

In order to get a feel for the conduct of interpretive ethnography, we will be collectively producing an interpretive account. Our topic—our “case”—is the tourist experience of a certain part of the Washington DC landscape: the monuments and memorials between the World War Two Memorial and the Lincoln Memorial, adjacent to the main section of the National Mall. This area spans the Vietnam War Memorial, the Korean War Memorial, the little-known monument to DC residents who were killed in the First World War, and the two bookend memorials (Lincoln and WWII). Our task is to come to some consensus understanding of the social rules implicated in the actions of tourists exploring this area. Our techniques for data-collection will be the basic tools of ethnography: participant-observation, “jotting” while in the field, and the writing of fieldnotes after observation is concluded.

In order to successfully complete this assignment, you must visit the region that we are studying *twice* in the next week. Time of day is up to you, although tourists tend not to be around too late in the evening, and our task here is to participant-observe tourists. Day of the week is also up to you—this is Washington DC, so there are always tourists at the memorials. [Note that everyone who is visiting the memorials can be safely regarded as a “tourist”; the only “locals” would be those people who have set up more or less permanent encampments near these memorials. “Tourist” here means people visiting the area we are studying, not just people from outside of the DC area visiting DC.] At each session, jot down observations, and then work those jots up into a fieldnote (as described in the Emerson et. al. book) after the session is concluded. Done properly, you should have at least two fieldnotes to bring to class next Thursday. Print each note out (one copy of each note is sufficient) and bring the printouts to class. We will be analyzing and summarizing those notes in class.