



Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography

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In these new essays, a group of experienced ethnographers, a literary critic, and a historian of anthropology, all known for advanced analytic work on ethnographic writing, place ethnography at the center of a new intersection of social history, interpretive anthropology, travel writing, discourse theory, and textual criticism.

The authors analyze classic examples of cultural description, from Goethe and Catlin to Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard, and Le Roy Ladurie, showing the persistence of allegorical patterns and rhetorical tropes. They assess recent experimental trends and explore the functions of orality, ethnicity, and power in ethnographic composition.

Writing Culture argues that ethnography is in the midst of a political and epistemological crisis: Western writers no longer portray non-Western peoples with unchallenged authority; the process of cultural representation is now inescapably contingent, historical, and contestable. The essays in this volume help us imagine a fully dialectical ethnography acting powerfully in the postmodern world system. They challenge all writers in the humanities and social sciences to rethink the poetics and politics of cultural invention.

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