

# Anthropology Department Winter 2013 Colloquia

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## *SEEING THROUGH VIOLENCE: HOMICIDE IN WEST OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA*

On a sunny Friday in 2009, I fell asleep with my two-year old son while putting him down for a nap. My slumber was soon interrupted by bursts of gunfire. Outside of my bedroom window, I saw my neighbor lying in the gutter while his girlfriend hovered above him in hysterics. I bolted out the door to help and when the first police respondent shooed me from the body, I returned to check on my son as well as retrieve my camera.

My home of thirteen years sits in a historically, African American neighborhood of Oakland, California that is partially responsible for making "Oakland" synonymous in the public imaginary with "violence." This neighborhood is also rapidly gentrifying. Of the five homicides on my block since my arrival, this was the only one where an African American murdered a white resident. All the other victims and perpetrators were black. Through a phenomenology of photographing the immediate aftermath of this murder, I compare it to my experience photographing the rituals and aftermaths of another murdered neighbor—that of an eighteen year-old African American crack dealer killed by a rival. These two murders offer a framework for analyzing the violence of my community through this moment of rapid change within a history of racism in the United States. Furthermore, I interrogate what it means to do participant-observation—with its ideas of the convergence of assimilation and distancing—when there is no distinction between the field and home and when spectacular violence creates the stakes.

JEFF SCHONBERG is a photographer and ethnographer in the joint Medical Anthropology program at the University of California, San Francisco and Berkeley. He is the co-author, (with Philippe Bourgois), of the book *Righteous Dopefiend*, winner of the 2010 Leeds Prize from the Society for Urban/National/Transnational and Global Anthropology. He has worked on projects in the U.S. on homelessness, addiction, gangs and inner-city violence, the drug economy and HIV; in Latin America on social upheaval and street youth. He is currently working on the subject of murder in his West Oakland community.

MONDAY, JANUARY 28<sup>TH</sup>  
3:30 - 5:00PM  
261, SOCIAL SCIENCES 1