

Anthropology of American Culture
(ANTH 4047)
Department of Anthropology, University of Minnesota
Fall 2009

Syllabus: <http://www.geocities.com/davidvalentine2002/syllabi/amcult2009.PDF>

E-Reserve: <http://eres.lib.umn.edu/eres/coursepage.aspx?cid=1326>

Password: asP3eys

Instructor: David Valentine

Class Times: M/W/F, 11:15am -12:05pm

Office: 364 HHH Center

Office Hours: Mon. 10-11am, Wed. 9-11am

Class Location:

Class Dates: 9/9/09-12/16/09

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Course Description:

What is “American Culture”? Given the diversity of the histories, values, and identities of American people, what, if anything, can be said to draw us together as one culture? This course will seek to answer this question through an exploration of cultural politics in the United States in the 21st century, focusing particularly on conflicts and politics around race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class, and on a variety of issues, including the workplace, corporate practices, civil rights, urban conflict, kinship, poverty, consumption, and militarization. Readings will address contemporary issues such as battles over civil rights and gay and lesbian rights, the militarization of US society, the idea of “community,” corporate culture, religious expression, racial politics, and immigration. We will ask questions such as: How do differences and similarities among Americans shape and get shaped by complex and often contradictory forces? How is inequality produced and maintained? How have ideas about what constitutes America shifted over time? At the top of the list of questions will be: what makes America America?

This course is designed to be a key element of the social science core by raising central questions about and providing critical social scientific skills not only for understanding contemporary American culture, but also your *own* imbrication in the systems of difference and social hierarchies that characterize contemporary American society. Using primarily secondary sources, you will be trained to look at how anthropologists (and scholars from several other disciplines, including history and sociology), use ethnographic and historical data to make arguments, and to develop those critical skills. Drawing on key disciplinary texts, debates, and themes in the anthropology of the United States, you will be asked to think of each text not only in terms of its content, but how to evaluate the argument in terms of the data presented, and by reading it critically alongside other class texts.

Moreover, this course locates the issues of diversity and social justice as central issues in readings and in class exercises. The course’s topics are organized to help you think critically --

not only about the facts of diversity in US society, but again by bringing you to engage your own imbrication in hierarchies of racial, class, gendered, and other forms of social difference.

The course will be run as an undergraduate seminar, based predominantly upon student-driven discussion of readings, complemented by occasional lectures and videos. Class discussions are crucial to the success of the class, and it is in these discussions that much of your learning will take place. Class discussions are aimed at both developing your critical thinking skills, but also at developing your skills as an American citizen, learning to recognize and engage the very social differences and issues we will be discussing.

Student Learning Outcomes

After completing this course, you should expect to be able to:

- 1. Locate and critically evaluate information:** You will be required not only to read course materials for their content, but to read critically for the core assumptions of the authors and to raise questions about those things which are not present in the text. By this I mean, you will be asked to read for the absences in a text as much as for what is there, a goal which is cumulative across the semester as we read more and as more themes are addressed.
- 2. Have acquired skills for effective citizenship and life-long learning:** Since this class raises key questions about structures of difference and social hierarchies in the US, a key goal is to train you in the critical skills needed for understanding contemporary social issues, but also how to engage in conversations about key arenas of social life with people with whom you may disagree about issues such as race, class, sexuality, gender, immigration, etc. At the end of this class, you should be equipped not only with more information about these issues, but more importantly, with “ways of listening” that will enable you to identify assumptions and positions of your interlocutors and to respond in those terms.

Course Requirements:

Writing requirements for the course are a midterm and final paper, and two short research projects, one involving your family and the other focused on your own consumption patterns and practices. Paper topics will be given well in advance of the due date.

Please note: *because this will be chiefly a seminar, classroom participation and participation in your discussion group sessions counts for a large amount and you are urged to come to class prepared so that you can participate fully.* In addition, discussion groups will be required to post discussion points prior to class on a regular basis in order to facilitate discussion.

Mid term paper:	30%
Final paper	35%
Projects (2)	20% (10% each)
Classroom Participation*	15%

* “Classroom participation” includes not only your participation in classroom discussions, but regular postings of discussion points to the class’s WebCT page, and participation in small discussion groups over the course of the semester.

Extensions

I do not grant extensions other than for exceptional circumstances. If you believe you are embroiled in such a circumstance, I expect you to request an extension at least a day before the paper is due; DO NOT come to class without completed work unless I have granted you an extension. We will not accept emailed versions of your papers or assignments.

Policy on Lateness and Attendance

Please pay particular attention to the following: you are, naturally, expected to attend all classes. It is expected that if you have to miss a class for a valid reason (such as illness or family emergency), you will inform me prior to the class, or as soon thereafter as is possible. I will take attendance in the first ten minutes of class. If you arrive late for class, you will not have the opportunity to sign the attendance sheet, and this will be noted as an absence. ***Please note the attendance policy: every three unexcused absences will result in a reduction of your grade by one grade point (e.g. from A- to B+).*** I will take a particularly dim view of absences in the Wednesday class before the Thanksgiving break.

Plagiarism and Grading

Plagiarism will not be tolerated, will result in a failing grade, and will be reported to the Student Conduct Committee. The university policy on plagiarism is available at:

<http://writing.umn.edu/tww/plagiarism/definitions.html>

The university grading policies can be found at:

<http://www1.umn.edu/usenate/policies/gradingpolicy.html>

Assigned Texts:

The following books are required for the course and are available at the university bookstore.

Goldschmidt, Henry

2006 Race and Religion Among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Ho, Karen Z.

2009 Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Lutz, Catherine

2002 Homefront: a military city and the American 20th century. Boston: Beacon.

Stein, Arlene

2002 The Stranger Next Door: The Story of a Small Community's Battle over Sex, Faith, and Civil Rights. Boston: Beacon.

Assigned books will be on reserve. The other course readings listed below will be available via E-reserve at the link at the head of this syllabus.

Course Outline

1. Introduction to the Course, or: Red, Purple, and Blue (Week of 9/9/09)

Wednesday: *Introductions, or, Why is This English Guy Teaching American Culture?*

No Readings

Friday: *Red, Purple, and Blue*

Abramowitz, Alan and Kyle Saunders

2005 Why Can't We All Just Get Along? The Reality of a Polarized America. *The Forum* 3(2): article 1.

Klinkner, Philip A. and Ann Hapanowicz

2005 Red and Blue Déjà Vu: Measuring Political Polarization in the 2004 Election. *The Forum* 3:(2): article 2.

2. Starting Out/Over: Terms, Themes, Histories (Week of 9/14/09)

Monday: *Self and Other*

di Leonardo, Micaela

1998 Hidden in Plain Site. In *Exotics at Home: Anthropologists, Others, American Modernity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wednesday: *Balance and Objectivity as American Ideals*

Schudson, Michael

2001 The objectivity norm in American journalism. *Journalism* 2(2):149–170.

Friday: *Starting Over?*

Fitzgerald, Frances

1986 Starting over. In *Cities on a hill*. pp.383-414. Simon and Schuster.

3. America in the World: Civilization, Militarization, and Culture (Week of 9/21/09)

Monday: *Clash of Civilizations*

Huntington, Samuel

1993 The Clash of Civilizations? *Foreign Affairs* 72(3):22-49.

Wednesday: *Clash of Civilizations?*

Gusterson, Hugh

2005 The Seven Deadly Sins of Samuel Huntington. In *Why America's Top Pundits are Wrong: Anthropologists Talk Back*. Catherine Besteman and Hugh Gusterson (eds.) pp.24-42

Friday: *Homefront*

Lutz, Catherine

2002 Homefront: a military city and the American 20th century. Boston: Beacon (*chapters to be assigned*)

4. Militarization, War, and Urban Space (Week of 9/28/09)

Monday, Wednesday, Friday: *Homefront*

Lutz, Catherine

2002 Homefront: a military city and the American 20th century. Boston: Beacon (*chapters to be assigned*)

Wednesday: Discussion Group

Friday: Discussion Group Reports

5. Connectedness: Kinship, Community, Identity (Week of 10/5/09)

Monday: *American Kinship*

Schneider, David M.

1968 American Kinship: a Cultural Account. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall (*selections*).

Wednesday: *Adoption, Kinship, and the State*

Briggs, Laura

2006 Making "American" Families: Transnational Adoptions and U.S. Latin America Policy. *In* Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History. Ann Laura Stoler (ed.) pp. 344-365.

Friday: *Other kinds of Connectedness*

McClard, Anne and Ken Anderson

2008 Focus on Facebook: Who Are We Anyway? Anthropology News 49(3):10-12.

Dumas, Firoozeh

2003 It's all Relatives. *In* Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing up Iranian in America. New York: Random House.

6. Connectedness: Kinship, Community, Identity (Week of 10/12/09)

Monday, Wednesday, Friday: *The Stranger Next Door*

Kinship Project due Friday

Stein, Arlene

2002 The Stranger Next Door: The Story of a Small Community's Battle over Sex, Faith, and Civil Rights. Boston: Beacon (*chapters to be assigned*).

7. Connectedness: Kinship, Community, Identity (Week of 10/19/09)

Monday, Wednesday, Friday: *The Stranger Next Door*

Stein, Arlene

2002 The Stranger Next Door: The Story of a Small Community's Battle over Sex, Faith, and Civil Rights. Boston: Beacon (*chapters to be assigned*).

Wednesday: Discussion Group

Friday: Discussion Group Reports

8. Religion and Faith (Week of 10/26/09)

****Paper 1 Due in Class****

Monday: *Conversion and Faith*

Harding, Susan

1987 Convicted by the Holy Spirit: the rhetoric of fundamental Baptist conversion. *American Ethnologist* 14(1):171-186.

Wednesday: *Alternative Faiths*

Jindra, Michael

1994 Star Trek Fandom as a Religious Phenomenon. *Sociology of religion* 55(1):27-

Foster, Lawrence

1995 Sexuality and Relationships in Shaker, Oneida, and Mormon Communities. *Communities* 87:52-56.

Friday: *Race and Religion*

Goldschmidt, Henry

2006 Race and Religion Among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press (*chapters to be assigned*).

9. Race and Religion (Week of 11/2/09)

Monday, Wednesday, Friday: *Race and Religion*

Goldschmidt, Henry

2006 Race and Religion Among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press (*chapters to be assigned*).

Wednesday: Discussion Group

Friday: Discussion Group Reports

10. Race, Gender, Consumption (Week of 11/9/09)

Monday: *Race, Gender, History*

di Leonardo, Micaela

1997 White Lies, Black Myths: Rape, Race, and the Black "Underclass." *in* the Gender Sexuality Reader. Roger Lancaster and Micaela di Leonardo (eds). NY: Routledge.

Wednesday: *Gender and Consumption*

Brown, Elspeth H.

2008 Marlboro Men: Outsider Masculinities and Commercial Modeling in Postwar America. *In* Producing Fashion: Commerce, Culture, and Consumers. Regina Lee Blaszczyk (ed). pp.187-206. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Friday: *Consumption and Corporate Practices*

Crawford, Margaret

1992 the World in a Shopping Mall. *In* Variations on a Theme Park : the New American City and the End of Public Space. Michael Sorkin (ed.) pp. 3-30. New York: Noonday Press.

11. Corporations, Capitalism, and Consumption (Week of 11/16/09)

Monday: *Corporations and Capitalisms*

Consumption Project Due Monday

Doukas, Dimitra

1997 Corporate Capitalism on Trial: the Hearings of the Anthracite Coal Strike Commission, 1902-1903. *Identities* 3(3):367-398.

Wednesday, Friday: *Liquidated*

Ho, Karen Z.

2009 *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

12. Corporations, Capitalism, and Consumption (Week of 11/23/09)

Monday, Wednesday: *Liquidated*

Ho, Karen Z.

2009 *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Friday: Thanksgiving Break

13. Immigration and Race, Self and Other (Week of 11/30/09)

Monday: *Ritual and American Identity*

Siskind, Janet

1992 The Invention of Thanksgiving: A Ritual of American Nationality. *Critique of Anthropology* 12(2):167-191

Wednesday: *Language and American Identity*

Wiley, Terrence G.

1998 The imposition of World War I Era English-Only Policies and the Fate of German in North America. *In Language and Politics in the United States and Canada: Myths and Realities*. B. Burnaby (Ed.). 211-241. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Wednesday: Discussion Group

Friday: Discussion Group Reports

14. Immigration and Race, Self and Other (Week of 12/7/09)

Monday: *Becoming White I*

Sacks, Karen Brodtkin

1994 How did Jews become white folks? *In Race*. Steven Gregory and Roger Sanjek (eds). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Wednesday: *Becoming White II*

Alisse Waterston

2006 Are Latinos Becoming "White" Folk? And What That Still Says about Race in America. *Transforming Anthropology* 14(2):133-150.

Friday: *Immigration, Race, and U.S. State Policy*

Coutin, Susan Bibler

2003 Cultural Logics of Belonging and Movement Transnationalism, Naturalization, and U.S. Immigration Politics. *American Ethnologist* 30(4):508-526.

15. Looking Back (Week of 12/14/09)

Monday: *Conversations I*

Wednesday: *Conversations II*

****Final Paper Due in Class****