American Regional Cultures and Global Transition: Appalachia, Louisiana, and the Texas Border Country

English 4597.02
Spring 2013 Lec 12492
Denney 250
Prof. Dorothy Noyes
noyes.10@osu.edu
TuTh 8:00-9:20

This course will introduce you to the folklore of three American regions. Each is famous for its traditional culture, but each is often thought of as deviating in a distinctive way from the national culture: Louisiana is “creole,” Texas is “border,” and Appalachia is “folk.” While exploring these differences, we’ll also observe the commonalities: positive and negative stereotyping from outside, complex racial and class composition, heavy in- and out-migration, environmental distinctiveness and stress, extraction economies, tense and often violent relationships with both government and business. We’ll look at historical change through the prism of celebrated folklore forms such as Louisiana Mardi Gras, Appalachian fairy tales, and the Tex-Mex corrido. We’ll also explore the impact of Hurricane Katrina and the reconstruction of the Gulf Coast, mountaintop-removal mining and the energy economy in Appalachia, and the cross-border trafficking of people, drugs, and capital. A general question arises: what counts as America?

This course counts as an elective in the Folklore Minor and the Folklore Concentration: see cfs.osu.edu/programs for more information.

THE GENERAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENT

This course counts for the old G.E.C. Capstone requirement and the new G.E. Cross-Disciplinary Seminar. The "Expected Learning Outcomes" prescribed for the latter are as follows:

1. Students understand the benefits and limitations of different disciplinary perspectives.
2. Students understand the benefits of synthesizing multiple disciplinary perspectives.
3. Students synthesize and apply knowledge from diverse disciplines to a topic of interest.

This course fulfills the capstone requirement by asking you to synthesize both contributions from different disciplines—folklore, history, literary studies, ethnomusicology, anthropology, and others—in order to address issues of general importance in the contemporary world. We’ll treat all sources as primary sources: that is, whether documentary film, analytical scholarship, or fiction, we’ll consider not only the information imparted but the agendas, perspectives, and
representational strategies of the source in question. Questions key to the GE experience include

- How do local traditions interact with national and global frameworks?
- How can we reconcile the insider’s experience of local culture as unique and distinctive with the evidence of structural commonalities among different regions?
- Why and how do some regions and social groups become stereotyped, and how does this affect their status and rights in the nation-state?

Students in English 4597.02 typically come from the full range of Arts and Sciences majors, even beyond the usual folklore course mix of humanities, arts, and social and behavioral science majors. I don’t expect you to have a background in folklore studies, and will try to help with the conventions of reading and conducting humanistic interpretive research. In addition, I hope you'll contribute your own disciplinary expertise and personal experience towards the group’s understanding of these regions.

REQUIRED TEXTS
You will need to bring the texts to class, either in hard copy or on an easily manageable device. You’ll also need pen and paper in case we decide to write something.

Books ordered at SBX


Other readings
Links are provided for readings directly available on the Web. Others, marked “Carmen,” will be under Content on the course site. Those marked “Library” can be found online through the library catalogue by searching the journal title. (Note that journals are sometimes in multiple repositories depending on the article’s publication year.) The readings come from a wide range of sources and some may seem opaque. Don’t panic. We will talk them through. When words and references are unfamiliar, try looking them up! But read through for the gist first.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

All requirements must be completed for a passing grade.

Showing up-preparing-participating 25%
Exam 1 15%
Exam 2 20%
Exam 3 25%
Film analysis 15%

1. Showing up. You won’t pass the exams without doing so. If you must miss a class, you should arrange to get the notes from a fellow student. You may not make up work missed due to absence except in documented cases of illness, etc. As per department policy, five absences automatically result in a final grade of F.

2. Preparing. You’re responsible for reading this syllabus and for checking both Carmen and your OSU email regularly. Check your email in the morning if there seems a likely snow emergency. I will post updates for each session under Discussions in Carmen before each class, including advice on accessing the readings and a general précis of what we’ll be doing.

The Ohio Board of Regents prescribes a 2:1 ratio of out-of-class work to formal instructional time. In other words, you should expect to devote an average of 5 1/2 hours a week of study time to this course. Give the readings adequate time: some may be deceptively simple, but the details matter, and some are more opaque. Given the complex timetables we all observe under semesters, it would be an excellent idea to schedule regular blocks of time to study for this course.

It’s also a good idea to keep up with the national news: the course will provide context for current debates on citizenship and national identity, environmental change, disaster cleanup, immigration, and pop culture, among others.

3. Participating. You need to be on time--alas, it is early--because I will ask questions on the reading first thing and you might be called on. You need to be awake. You need to be engaged: class time on semesters is precious, so please shut down all electronic distractions. You should have relevant contributions to make in discussion and respond respectfully to other speakers--we are talking about difficult issues on which reasonable people can disagree. It would be advisable to take notes! And occasionally I may ask you to write a little something.

4. Three essay exams, one for each region, asking you to synthesize readings and class discussion in relation to major regional issues and cultural forms. Ca. 1500 well-chosen words for the first two; ca. 3000 for the final.

5. A film analysis. I’ll give you a list of fiction films (or in some cases TV programs) set in our various regions. If you’ve got a good idea that’s not on my list, feel free to
propose it. Your job is to write an analysis of the film--about 1500 words--as a representation of regional issues. You must connect it explicitly to readings and discussion from class. (Note: if the film has been discussed in class, your reading will need to acknowledge this and to develop the analysis significantly further.) You may turn this in at any time in the semester up through the exam period, but not before the end of the relevant regional unit.

4. Seeking my help when you need it. Stuff happens: if you need accommodation owing to personal upheavals, let me know--sooner rather than later--and we will find a way to help you manage the course. If I hear on the last day of class that you've been in crisis, there is not much I can do.

More generally, if you find yourself confused or concerned about material in the course, approaches and assignments, my feedback, or my intermittently legible handwriting, please come to office hours or approach me after class--again, sooner rather than later. Often a few words can clarify the situation and keep a small problem from ballooning. Of course you are also welcome to come talk further about issues that interest you!

SCHEDULE

Introduction

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>1/8</td>
<td>What is a regional culture? What is national culture? How can we compare cultures?</td>
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I. Southwest Louisiana: A Creole Culture

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<tr>
<td>1/10</td>
<td>Introduction to Louisiana history. Images of French Louisiana.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Read</td>
<td>Swapping Stories, xxv-xlvi, 3-26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Film</td>
<td>Louisiana Story, dir. Robert Flaherty 1948</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/15</td>
<td>Further discussion of Louisiana Story. How to read a film.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Read</td>
<td>Boatright, Mody 1961. &quot;The Oil Promoter as Trickster.&quot; In Singers and Storytellers, ed. Boatright et al., 76-91. Dallas: Texas Folklore Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/17</td>
<td>Creolization, language, and narrative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Read</td>
<td>Swapping Stories, Part I: Individual Storytellers.</td>
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2/7 | Environments of uncertainty  

**II. Texas: A Border Culture (with a bit of California...)**

2/12 | Intro to Texas  
Film | “Chulas Fronteras (the Beautiful Border),” dir. Les Blank, 1976  
Due | Exam 1

2/14 | Border society  
Read | Paredes, Américo. *"With His Pistol In His Hand,"* chs. 1-2.

2/19 | Border society and song construction  
Read | Paredes continued—finish chs. 3 and 4.

2/21 | Conflicts of memory  

2/26 | Class and change in Mexican-American society  

### 2/28
- **The Chicano movement in music and mural**

**Read**

### 3/5
- **Mutations of the corrido: migration and narcotrafficking**

**Read**

**Film**
"Al Otro Lado (To the Other Side)," dir. Natalia Almada, 1996.

**Exam 2 distributed**

### 3/7
- **Beyond the border**

### 3/8
- **Exam 2 due in Carmen dropbox before you leave for break**

### III. Appalachia: A Mountain Culture

### 3/19
- **Introduction to Appalachia: Representing the Region**

**Read**

**Film**
Excerpt from *Appalachian Journey* (Alan Lomax, dir. Association for Cultural Equity, 1991.)

### 3/21
- **Outsiders, aspirations, and propriety**

**Read**

### 3/26
- **Fairy tales and family relations: ogres, witchy women and fighting men**

**Read**
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| 4/9  | Moving mountains  
| 4/11 | Appalachian college students and Appalachian Ohio today  
Guest speakers: Dr. Patty Cunningham, Office of Student Life, and Ms. Cassie Patterson, Assistant Director of the Center for Folklore Studies, co-PIs of Appalachian Project Ohio State.  
| 4/16 | Are we America? Appalachian images in circulation  
Film Clips from “Deliverance,” dir. John Boorman, 1972, and other films- |
| 4/18 | Conclusion. Delta, border, mountain: different?  
Final exam distributed |
| 4/30 | Final exam due in dropbox |
AND SOME MORE DETAILS

Office hours and office contact info

Monday 11-1 and Thursday 10:30-12:30, Center for Folklore Studies, 308 Dulles, 230 W. 17th Ave. (292-1639). Please note that I usually work in my other office at the Mershon Center, 1501 Neil Ave. (corner of 8th), and can meet you there if we need to meet outside of normal office hours. I am affiliated with multiple units on campus and have a manic meeting schedule, occasionally needing to cancel scheduled hours. Therefore it is a good idea to let me know you’re coming, and when to expect you. Nonetheless I am always happy to make time for you!

Grading scale:

F. You and/or your assignments failed to materialize at the necessary minimum; written work was not done, not relevant to the assignment, or not your own.

D. You’ve done just enough work to slide through: done some reading, turned in all major assignments with minimal attention to their requirements, and been present in body and occasionally in soul.

C. You’ve done the course reading and turned in all required work on time and in the spirit of the assignment. You’ve been present in both body and mind as a useful participant in the class. Your course assignments were of limited value, perhaps because of major problems with mechanics, organization, or logic in your writing, or perhaps because you have not thought very deeply about the material.

B. You’ve done everything required for a C, but have responded more fully to the demands of the course, both in class and in your writing. Your written work demonstrates your engagement with both the readings and class discussion. You’ve made progress in reading challenging material, drawing connections between different cultural forms and situations, and shaping your thinking through writing.

A. You’ve done everything required for a B. In addition, you’ve read actively, thought creatively, and written with style. I’ve learned something from you.

Class Cancellation. In the unlikely event of class cancellation due to emergency, I will contact you via email and request that a note on department letterhead be placed on the door. In addition, I will contact you as soon as possible following the cancellation to let you know what will be expected of you for our next class meeting.

Plagiarism. Plagiarism is the representation of another’s works or ideas as one’s own: it includes the unacknowledged word for word use and/or paraphrasing of
another person's work, and/or the inappropriate unacknowledged use of another person's ideas. In accordance with university rules, all cases of suspected plagiarism will be reported to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. Be careful to credit your sources appropriately, especially when doing research on the Internet (come to me if you are not certain how to do this). And bear in mind that it is far less work to write the thing yourself than to plagiarize convincingly.

**Disability resources.** Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated, and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office for Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue; telephone 292-3307, TDD 292-0901; http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/.