

# **ANTH 209.001: ANTHROPOLOGY OF AMERICAN CULTURE**

## **Li-007**

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### **Office Hours:**

Mondays, 1-3 p.m.  
Wednesdays, 1-3 p.m.

### **class description:**

At its inception in the late 18th century, American Studies included the search for the purported "national character" of the newly formed United States. "What then is the American, this new man?" asked de Crèvecoeur in 1782. Later commentators looked to immigration, the frontier, individualism and adaptability as essential, national characteristics. Today, of course, "American exceptionalism" could just as easily be defined through negative qualities. The United States is, as of 2005, the most obese country and the biggest emitter of greenhouse gases; among industrialized countries, the U.S. shows the largest gap between rich and poor, has the highest number of uninsured people and executes the most prisoners. Per capita, gun-related deaths in the U.S. exceed Brazil and Mexico, are approximately twice that of Northern Ireland, three times that of France and fourteen times that of England (Associated Press, 4/17/1998).

However, a truly anthropological understanding is inimical to such essentialist definitions of culture, whether critical or self-aggrandizing. Instead, this course considers the United States as a concatenation of real and imagined geographies crossed by overlapping networks of immigration, globalization and transnationalism. That is, the United States is more than the sum of its geopolitical borders; it exists in the practices and experiences of people and institutions abroad as well as within the U.S., in the proliferation of global culture, in the impact of U.S. foreign policy, in the resentments and aspirations of a world population variously impacted by the "American century."

Rather than some ontological project defining national character, this class will approach the anthropology of American culture through the metaphor of movement. Starting from an ethnography of West African immigrants to New York, we look to multiple valences connoted by the meaning of "citizenship" as entrepreneurs negotiate the institutions that govern their American lives. Shifting registers, we will then turn to life and work in what Manuel Castells has called the "network society," i.e., the social, cultural and institutional changes that have taken place as the U.S. moves to a knowledge-based economy. Is this frenetically paced, boom-and-bust lifestyle really the future of the United States? Are there alternatives to monolithic, "global" cultures? Finally, we follow Americans in a series of essays and short stories about the life of the "expat," raising questions about the

extent to which the U.S. is truly "globalized" at all. If cosmopolitanism is a "dynamic of mutual transformation" (Michel Feher), then what would a United States truly transformed by immigration, globalism and cultural difference look like?

In a class where every student is a potential expert on some facet of American life, I expect everyone to participate enthusiastically. After all, the answers to these perplexing questions could just as easily emerge from our discussions.

**required readings:**

The following texts are available in the campus bookstore:

Henry de Tesson, Christina (2002). *Expat*. NY: Seal Press.

Stoller, Paul (2002). *Money Has No Smell*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Terranova, Tiziana (2004). *Network Culture*. Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press.

**graded assignments:**

attendance

Attendance in this course is required. Here's how it works: students begin the course with an "A" in attendance but, for each class missed, lose two points. However: each student can miss two "grace classes" before being penalized. 30 pts.

activities and homework

Students will (occasionally) undertake activities related to readings and lectures, including group discussions, films and out-of-class assignments. Students will be graded on the work they produce and their participation in the activity. 20 pts.

first exam (March 2)

The midterm exam will test both your knowledge and understanding with a battery of multiple choice, "True-False" and short answer questions. 50 pts

second exam (April 6)

The final exam will test your intellectual probity through a combination of multiple choice and short answer questions. 50 pts.

final exam (May 13)

The final examination will measure your apprehension through the application of ideas and theories from lectures, readings and films to different situations drawn from current events. 50 pts

**class grading:**

A 186+

A- 180-185

B+ 174-179

B 166-173

B- 160-165

C+ 154-159

C 146-153

C- 140-145

D+ 134-139

D 120-133

F <120

**class schedule:**

1st Week: Introduction to the course and explanation of syllabus.  
(1/26-1/28) What is Anthropology?

2nd Week: Race, Gender and American Anthropology  
(1/31-2/4) Assigned Reading: Stoller, vii-27.

Film: The New Americans (2004)

February 3: Change of Schedule Period Ends

3rd Week: The New Immigration  
(2/7-2/11) Assigned Reading: Stoller, 28-63

4th Week: Globalization and Global Culture  
(2/14-2/18) Assigned Reading: Stoller, 64-120  
Film: Secrets of Silicon Valley

5th Week: Postmodernism.  
(2/21-2/25) Assigned Reading: Stoller, 121-175

6th Week: Wednesday, March 2: First Examination.  
(2/28-3/4) Film: Game Over  
Assigned Reading: Stoller, 176-182; Terranova, 1-38

7th Week: The Network Society  
(3/7-3/11) Assigned Reading: Terranova, 39-72

Film: Edward Said on Orientalism (1998, Sut Jhalley)

8th Week: Critical Theory and Media  
(3/14-3/18) Assigned Reading: Terranova, 73-97

Wag the Dog (1998, Barry Levinson)

9th Week: SPRING BREAK  
(3/21-3/25)

10th Week: Knowledge and Power  
(3/28-4/1) Terranova, 98-130  
Film: Manufacturing Consent

11th Week: Wednesday, April 6: Second Examination  
(4/4-4/8) Assigned Reading: Terranova, 131-157.

April 6: Last day to withdraw with a 'W'; last day to change pass/fail and audit options.

12th Week: The U.S. Abroad  
(4/11-4/15) Assigned Reading: Expat, 1-57.

Film: Lost in Translation (2003, Sofia Coppola)

13th Week: Universalism, Pluralism and Cosmopolitanism  
(4/18-4/22) Assigned Reading: Expat, 58-106.

14th Week: Cultural Imperialism, Cultural Resistance  
(4/25-4/29) Assigned Reading: Expat, 107-152.

15th Week: Transnationalism and Nationalism?  
(5/2-5/6) Assigned Reading: Expat, 153-221.  
Film: War Made Easy (2006, Norman Solomon)

16th Week: Utopia, Dystopia and Alternative Futures  
(5/9-5/11) Assigned Reading: Expat, 222-298

Last Day of Classes: May 12

Final Examination: May 13, 10:15-12:15 pm

**notes**

1. Although exams and graded work will remain as stated above, I may have to change different readings or films on the syllabus throughout the semester. I will, in any case, try to give you ample warning of any syllabus changes.
2. Each student is required to review and understand the University's rules regarding cheating and plagiarism (Towson University Undergraduate Catalog, Appendix F). Neither will be tolerated in my class and will result in a flunking grade.

**Department Statement on Academic Dishonesty**

The faculty of the Department of Sociology, Anthropology & Criminal Justice take a strong stand against *Academic Dishonesty* of all forms. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in any class. It includes, but is not limited to, any form of cheating or unapproved help on an exam or academic exercise, copying someone else's written work without citation, presenting fabricated information as legitimate, any unauthorized collaboration among students, or assisting someone to cheat in any way. All students have the ethical responsibility for doing their own work. A student who is uncertain about whether or not something constitutes academic dishonesty in a particular class has the obligation to see their instructor for clarification. Consistent with university policy, the minimum penalty for academic dishonesty in any form is determined by the individual faculty member in each class, and may consist of "a reduced grade (including "F" or zero) for the assignment; a reduced grade (including "F") for the entire course," or other options as stipulated in Appendix F of the Undergraduate Catalog. Students who are charged with academic dishonesty must remain enrolled in the course and cannot withdraw. Instructors who make the determination that academic dishonesty has occurred will notify the student in writing of the finding, the penalty, and the process for appeal. The same written notice will be forwarded

3. Students with learning disabilities should register at the Disability Support Services Office.

**explanation of grading**

Consistent with University policy, the following grades will be assigned according to the designated criteria:

A: A superior performance surpassing assigned work in unique and novel ways and integrating diverse ideas from a wide range of sources in addition to those discussed in class.

A-

B+

B: Excellent work surpassing the expectations of the assignment and demonstrating initiative

and a willingness to move beyond the basic requirements of the assigned work.

B-

C+

C: Satisfactory work meeting all basic requirements of the assignment.

C-

D+

D: Work in some way less than satisfactory. Although conforming to basic requirements in some way, the completed work is nevertheless not a coherent response to the assignment.

F: A profoundly unsatisfactory performance which doesn't meet the intent of the assignment at any level.