

American Life and Culture

ANTH 180 / AMST 180

Syllabus

Winter 2011

T/Th D101

Either ANTH 180 or AMST 180 may be taken for credit, not both.

Instructor: Manouchehr Shiva, Ph.D.

Contact: mshiva@bellevuecollege.edu

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

This course provides an introduction to a cultural understanding of contemporary American society. We discuss major theoretical and conceptual principles and perspectives of present-day cultural anthropologists and the way they could be applied to study the life-ways of various American communities. We explore how the perspectives and methods offered by anthropology, so useful for understanding others, can assist us understand the United States.

We also view the United States as a linkage of real and imagined geographies crossed by overlapping networks of immigration, globalization and transnationalism. We look at how the United States is more than the sum of its geopolitical borders, how it exists in the practices and experiences of people and institutions abroad as well as within the U.S. We look at the proliferation of global culture, in the impact of U.S. foreign policy, and in the resentments and desires of a world population variously impacted by the American century.

This is an inter-active or a seminar-like class. Class participation, questioning, and critical thinking are highly encouraged.

You will take an active part in your learning process. You are asked to participate in the class discussions prepared, work on research projects, share and actively participate in the class's learning process, and critically reflect on what you read, see or hear.

Readings

I – Distant Mirrors: America As A Foreign Culture

**Philip R. DeVita/James D. Armstrong (eds.)
Wadsworth/Thomson Learning**

From the book advertisement:

“To understand the full impact of ethnography, to experience cultural relativity, and to gain a foundation to build informed comparisons, students need a firm grasp of their own culture. This third edition reader consists of 19 essays written by anthropologists and other scholars using an ethnographic perspective. The essays enable students to understand themselves better by focusing on their own culture and seeing it from a new perspective. This collection gives anthropology a comparative perspective that provides a reflective lens, a mirror, for understanding ourselves and the world in which we live.”

2) Reflecting on America: Anthropological Views of U.S. Culture

Clare L. Boulanger (2008)

3) A series of short articles and chapters are also provided to complement the assigned books and the audio-visual materials.

Audio-visual material: A major part of the information presented in the class is audio-visual in nature. Visual anthropology is very much emphasized in this class. Because of the comparative nature of anthropological method, we rely on films on various aspects of life in the U.S. and the American culture and communities to discuss class subjects.

Grading — Total of 1000 points

Class Attendance and Participation: 100 points

Unit Assignments/ Feedbacks: 150 points

Five Quizzes 250 points

Final Exam: 250 points

Research Project: 250 points

Quizzes are Bi-weekly (The First Quiz is on January 18th)

The Final Exam date and the Due Date for the Research Project Report: Tuesday March 23rd.

Research Project

The focus of the research project is the study of an aspect of life in the US or an aspect of what is referred to as the American life, preferably in the contemporary context. Students choose the focus of their research project by the second week of the quarter. Project topics have to do with subjects and information from our readings, class discussions, and your own research and interest.

The report should show the progress of the research process during the quarter and your thinking behind it.

Research Projects Report should include the following :

- 1) The historical context**
- 2) The ideological, religious or worldview-related aspects**
- 3) The socio-economic class aspects**

- 4) **The socialization/enculturation or learning aspects**
- 5) **The communicative, symbolic or linguistic aspects**
- 6) **The gender-related, family-related, kinship-related or generation-related aspects**
- 7) **The communal identity (racial, ethnic, national, ethno-religious, ...) aspects**
- 8) **Power-related or political aspects**
- 9) **Global or globalization-related aspects**
- 10) **Proper citation and bibliography**

Minimum length – Five typed pages, double-spaced, excluding bibliography, it should show the progress of the research process and thinking behind it.

Class Content - UNITS

Unit 1 / Week One - Culture

Understanding the Other and the Self

Culture and Cultural Anthropological Perspectives

Cultural Studies

Anthropological Fieldwork and Research Methods

Comparative Approach

Cultural Relativism and Ethnocentrism

Holistic Approach

Culture and Power

Culture and History

Culture and Globalization,

Culture and Gender

Culture and Generation

Culture and Class,

Culture and Ethnicity/Nationalism

Readings:

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 1

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 2

Reflecting on America Introduction and Chapter 1

Reflecting on America - Chapter 17

Reflecting on America - Chapter 18

Unit 2 / Week Two - Ritual, Power, History and Myth

Culture and Ritual

Ritual and Ritualization

Ritual and Construction of Class, Gender, Generation, Ethnic and National Identities

Ritual and Power

History, Myth, and Ritual

Readings:

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 3

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 4

Reflecting on America - Chapter 2

Reflecting on America - Chapter 3

Unit 3 / Week Three - Religion

Religion in America

Anthropological Perspective in Studying Religious Beliefs and Practices

Public and Private Dimensions of Religion in American Lives

Religions and American Politics

Readings:

Reflecting on America - Chapter 4

Reflecting on America - Chapter 5

Reflecting on America - Chapter 6

Unit 4 / Week Four - Political Economy and Socio-Economic Stratification

Political Economy and Class in the U.S.

Production, Distribution, and Consumption Patterns in the U.S.

Culture and Class

The Meaningful and the Material

Constructions of Class in America

Readings:

Reflecting on America - Chapter 7

Reflecting on America - Chapter 8

Reflecting on America - Chapter 9

Reflecting on America - Chapter 12

Unit 5 Socialization / Week Five - Enculturation

Mid-term exam is scheduled during the fifth week of the class

Enculturation and Socialization

Aspects of American Childhood and Adolescence

Anthropology of American Education

Anthropology of American Higher Education

Socialization/Enculturation and Sub-cultures

Media and Enculturation/Socialization

Readings:

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 6

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 7

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 15

Reflecting on America - Chapter 14

Mid-Term Exam

Unit 6 / Week Six - Language, Society, Worldview and Culture

Language, Gender, Class, and Ethnicity in America

Language and Power

Language and Worldview

Language, Culture and Subcultures

American Media and Language

American English and Globalization

Readings:

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 8

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 9

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 10

Reflecting on America - Chapter 15

Reflecting on America - Chapter 16

Unit 7 / Week Seven - Gender, Generation and Family in the U.S.

Gender in America

Youth and American Culture

Representations of the Youth in the Media

The Elderly in America

American Family Patterns

Readings:

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 11

Reflecting on America - Chapter 10

Unit 8/Week Eight - Race, Ethnicity and Nationalism

Race and Racism in America

Constructing Ethnicity in America

Nation and Nationalism in America

Trans-Nationalism in America

Immigration and Making of America

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 12

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 13

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 14

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 16

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 17

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 19

Reflecting on America - Chapter 13

Unit 9/Week Nine - Power, Politics and The State

Culture of American Politics

Power and Politics

Concepts in Political Anthropology

The State

Class, Power and the State

Power and Ideology

Political Rituals

Readings:

Distant Mirrors – Chapter 18

Reflecting on America - Chapter 11

Unit 10/Week Ten - Case Studies

Based on the interest of the instructor and the students a few topics are chosen to study and apply cultural anthropological and cultural studies approaches.

Examples:

American Media and American Life

Sports in America

Violence in America

American Politics Abroad

Readings:

Internet Academic Sources

Unit 11/Week Eleven

Research Project Discussions

Final Exam