

# ANTHROPOLOGY OF AMERICAN LIFE

(ANTH 180/AMST 180)

Bellevue Community College - Winter, 2008

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This course is both Anthropology and American Studies. I developed the course with the purpose of deepening our understanding of American culture. Click on my background page if you wish to know a little about your resident anthropologist. My assumption is that you already have the basics of computer and Internet use; it's enough of a task just learning to use this instructional program. I will not be on the BCC campus--I presently live in California. But, you can always reach me via the Mail tool within Vista. For this course to work, you should check into this Anthropology of American Life site very regularly and stay in touch with the class via the Discussions.

In the pursuit of education, nothing is more important than our learning about and reflecting on the human situation and on the nature of human cultures, both our own and those of others. These topics make up the subject matter of anthropology. In this specific course we will examine American culture in-depth, hopefully shedding some light both on the diversity of American culture and the relationship between our own cultural patterns and those of other societies. Anthropological perspectives are presented in this course, but the course is interdisciplinary and includes a variety of subjects such as: the historical origins of our culture; the effects of technological and economic change; the shaping of political values; the diverse ethnic groups that make up American society; and the interpretation of popular culture.

## REQUIRED READING:

Philip DeVita and James Armstrong, **Distant Mirrors: America as a Foreign Culture, 3rd Ed.**

Eric Schlosser, **Fast Food Nation**

Ronald Takaki, **A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America (Selections)**

Barbara Kingsolver, **Pigs in Heaven**

**EXAMS AND GRADING:** Your final grade will be based on 3 online exams, a comprehensive final exam, plus your class participation. Class participation refers to your ongoing contributions to the online discussions on topics in American Studies. Since we are all anthropological "informants" regarding American culture, in that we are all actively participating in ongoing American society, your class participation is important in this course. Throughout the quarter I will initiate new topics for forum discussions as we move through the course material and will track student participation carefully. Your grade for participation will be based not simply on whether you participate in each forum but the degree to which your comments are informed by what you have learned from lectures and reading. The Participation grade is relative to the class as a whole, so there is no absolute

number of contributions for calculating a grade. It is a qualitative as well as quantitative evaluation of contributions to the discussion forums. I look at: 1. How many contributions have been made? 2. How well do they cover the full range of topics (forums) included in the course? 3. Do they meaningfully advance the class discussion? 4. How well thought out and developed are they? 5. Are they substantive and on topic? 6. Do they reflect that you have been studying and learning from the course material?

The three exams count 20% each (60% total), the Final counts 20%, and class participation counts 20% of your final grade. Parts One and Two of the course are each followed by an exam (Exams I and II) that covers the reading material and lectures in that part of the course. The exam following Part Three is of a different nature. Half of Exam III will be in the form of your responses to posted questions on the reading assignment. Your grades on this exam will be based partly on your contributions to answering questions in the public forum and partly on your performance in a more standard exam. The Final Exam follows Part Four of the course and is comprehensive in nature. Your final grade for the course will be calculated as a total percentage then converted to a letter grade as follows: 90% and above is in the A range; 80-89% is in the B range; 70-79% is in the C range; and 58% or above will be necessary for passing the course. For general Social Science Division policies and rules regarding such matters as grading, withdrawals, and incompletes click on <http://www.bcc.ctc.edu/socsci/> and then on "Student Info and Policies." This is a course in which YOU WILL GET OUT WHAT YOU PUT IN. If you are self-motivated and put in a good effort EACH WEEK, you will learn a lot and end up with a good grade. You will need to stay on schedule and to put in a steady effort. I do not accept late work. If you have any problems regarding the course please feel free to contact me at anytime through Vista's Mail.

**AN IMPORTANT NOTE ON PLAGIARISM:** It is strictly against BCC rules for a student to borrow from another source without crediting this source. Because it is so easy to get material from the Internet, students sometimes think they can incorporate online material, or "borrow" from one another without proper citation. This is called plagiarism. Bellevue Community College has rules that make plagiarism grounds for failure in a class and ultimately expulsion from the school. Remember, if a student's essay answer is basically identical to that of another student (from this or a previous quarter), there are only two possible reasons: either the answer was copied from the one student by the other or they both copied it from the same source. In both cases this is plagiarism. If you copy you must use quote marks and a citation. For the purposes of the exams in this course, don't be worried about the exact form for citations. I'm only concerned that you give credit where it is due. But even if you are taking material from the lectures or from assigned reading you do need to be clear that is what you are doing. You might say, for instance, "According to the lecture...." or, "Takaki says..." And if it is a direct quote be sure to use quote marks.

## **COURSE OUTCOMES**

At the end of the course, you should be able to:

1. Describe the approach to studying people taken by cultural anthropologists, identify the various components of the culture concept, and explain what is included in all cultures

2. Explain some of the differences in the anthropological approach when applied to our own culture in contrast with other cultures and explain some of the insights gained from studies made of aspects of American culture by foreign scholars doing fieldwork in this country
3. Identify the major characteristics of American political economy and contrast these with modes of subsistence and economic exchange in other societies in the past and in non-industrialized societies
4. Identify changes in the American ethos and forms of individualism from the earliest religious and Enlightenment roots through the development of consumer culture
5. Describe the theoretical approaches and the conclusions drawn regarding American culture in the studies done by such social scientists as Marvin Harris, Francis Hsu, and Robert Bellah; and draw contrasts among, and offer critiques of, these approaches
6. Explain the modern anthropological views on ethnicity including the critique of the popular understanding of the meaning of "race"
7. Demonstrate knowledge of the history of multicultural America by specifically describing some of the major events in Native American, African American, Latino history, as well Irish and Chinese experiences using first-person accounts as well as other historical information
8. Describe some of the representations of American life drawn from television and film and offer critiques of this material based on scholarly sources as well as cultural self-reflection

**Each week you will need to do the following:**

1. Read and study the assigned reading material;
2. Spend some time reading the relevant lecture--you will probably need to print out the lectures--and reviewing the slides that accompany the lecture material;
3. Be involved in class-related conversation with your fellow students through the Discussions.

The boxed material that follows is the basic outline and structure of the quarter's work. New lectures will be posted regularly as we move through the course modules. The Exams will be available for you to take over a two day period; you will find completion dates for each of the Exams below. There are exams scheduled at the end of each of the first three parts of the course which cover the lecture and reading material of each of these three parts of the course. But since some of the material is cumulative in nature the expectation is that you will be able to show that you know more and more as the quarter proceeds. Finally, note that the last of the four exams (the Final Exam) is comprehensive and includes questions from the entire course.

LECTURE TOPICS	TEXTS AND EXAMS:
<p><b><u>PART ONE: Who are We?</u></b></p> <p>LECTURE ONE: The nature of anthropology and culture</p> <p>LECTURE TWO: The material foundations of American Life</p>	<p>Read: DeVita and Armstrong, <i><b>Distant Mirrors: America as a Foreign Culture</b></i>, 3rd Ed.</p> <p><b>EXAM I:</b> (Covering Lectures 1 and 2 and Distant Mirrors) - Available Saturday morning, January 19. Complete by midnight, the end of <u>Sunday, January 20.</u></p>
<p><b><u>PART TWO: The American Ethos</u></b></p> <p>LECTURE THREE: Viewing the American Ethos through Kinship Studies</p> <p>LECTURE FOUR: Individualism and Habits of the Heart</p>	<p>Read: Eric Schlosser, <i><b>Fast Food Nation</b></i>.</p> <p><b>EXAM II:</b> (Covering Lectures 3 and 4 and Fast Food Nation) - Available Wednesday morning, February 6. Complete by midnight, the end of <u>Thursday, February 7.</u></p>
<p><b><u>PART THREE: The History of Multicultural America</u></b></p> <p>LECTURE FIVE: The Anthropology of Ethnicity and Race</p>	<p>Read: Ronald Takaki, <i><b>A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America</b></i>, Pages 1-221 and 373-428</p> <p><b>EXAM III</b> (Covering Lecture 5 and assigned sections of <i>A Different Mirror</i>) - Online exam section available Tuesday morning, February 26. Complete by midnight, the end of <u>Wednesday, February 27.</u> [Note: One-half of your grade for this exam will be based on your timely contributions to forum questions on the text.]</p>
<p><b><u>PART FOUR: American Images and Realities</u></b></p> <p>LECTURE SIX: Some Reflections</p>	<p>Read: Barbara Kingsolver, <i><b>Pigs in Heaven</b></i></p> <p><b>FINAL EXAM:</b> (Covering the entire course) -Available Friday morning, March 14. Complete by midnight, the end of <u>Saturday, March 15.</u></p>