

American Studies 01:050 264:01 American Folklife

“Tradition simply means that we need to end what began well and continue what is worth continuing.”
--Jose Bergamin

Fall Semester 2008
Mondays and Thursdays 10:55 to 12:15
Ruth Adams Building, Room 001
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Complete syllabus is available on American Studies Website:
<http://amerstudies.rutgers.edu>

Course Synopsis

The concept of “folklife” offers a promising area for original research in American folklore. Offsetting generations of literature-oriented and text-dominated folklore studies, the students of American folklife now examine the whole range of traditional verbal lore, behavior, and material creations in folk circulation. In most instances, the term “folklife” as used in American folklore study refers to material culture.

Course Requirements and Expectations

This is a reading-intensive course. There are required readings for nearly every class meeting, and for most weeks the reading load will be in the range of 100 to 150 pages. Specific page numbers are often assigned day by day. You are expected to do the reading for a given day before coming to class so as to be prepared to discuss that reading intelligently. Failure to do the readings will most likely lead to failure on exams and papers. Students who find this reading load excessive might want to seek out other academic pursuits.

There will be a midterm and a final exam. The exams will test your ability to identify key names, places, and phrases from the texts we have read and the documentary films that we have viewed. Regular attendance will be essential to your success in this course.

You are expected to have an active Rutgers email account @eden.rutgers.edu. You should have regular access to the internet. You will be expected to check Sakai several times a week.

Required Texts

The following books are available at the Co-Op Bookstore on the Douglass Campus and at New Jersey Books on Somerset Street on the College Avenue Campus:

1. John McPhee, *The Pine Barrens*
2. James F. McCloy & Ray Miller, *The Jersey Devil*
3. Jack Santino, *All Around the Year: Holidays and Celebrations in American Life*
4. Martha C. Sims & Martine Stephens, *Living Folklore*

Reading Advice

The kind of reading you have to do in college is usually complex and demanding, and even the best students do not understand everything the first time through. College reading asks you to think—and think again; read—and revise your readings; understand—and understand more completely.

Do not panic and do not give up. By its nature, academic reading often deals with topics you do not know very much about; the topics often are complicated, with many levels of meaning. So expect some struggle and work when you read college texts. There is nothing wrong or lacking in you. No one else is having an easy time of it.

Film Study Advice

We shall be screening a number of important nonfiction documentary films. We will discuss the cultural contexts for these films (why they were made and what they tell us about the social concerns of the period) and the theoretical questions they raise, including drawing the line between fiction and non-fiction. Most importantly, we will ask the question: Is there such a thing as unbiased presentation? Since the quality of your written work will crucially depend upon first-hand knowledge of each film, we encourage you to view each film twice—once in class and later at the media room of the Douglass Library where the films will be placed on reserve after being shown in class. In addition, use of videotapes or DVD's on your own is encouraged (insofar as the films are available in these formats). Some of these you may wish to purchase or to borrow from your local public library. You should always try to watch a film twice, since you pick up many subtleties the second time. In most cases, we will prepare a take-home study guide that will be put online. These study guides may prove useful in preparing for the examinations. They will not be turned in or graded, but they should be answered completely.

Grading

There will be a midterm exam on Monday, October 20, 2008, which counts for 40% of your grade and a final exam on Monday, December 22, 2008, which counts for 60% of your grade. However, attendance is also a factor. If you need to be absent from class for a legitimate reason, notify me either in advance or with proper documentation after the fact. Beyond this, however, you miss class at your own risk. Note that “legitimate reasons” include medical problems, family emergencies and the like; they do not include broken vehicles, scheduling problems at work, or late trains. Life sometimes does get in the way of attending class, but if you think you may be absent more than two or three times during the semester then it would be better if you took a different course.

Examinations

The midterm covers the first half of the course with a number of objective questions. The final covers the second half of the course. In addition to a number of objective (multiple choice) questions, the final will also give you a chance to write two essays to demonstrate your skill at handling ideas. Attendance at both the midterm and final examinations is mandatory and required. This obligation must have top priority if you expect to receive credit for the course. Be sure to arrange your work schedule and your personal schedule accordingly. If you do not take the exams, you will not get credit for the course. The exams will be given at the scheduled time only. There are no alternate dates or make-ups. You may be excused only for illness that requires hospitalization or a documented death in your immediate family. Unless there is a drastic emergency of this nature that can be substantiated and documented, we expect you to attend and take the exams on schedule.

In the belief that proper crib preparation is indistinguishable from studying, I have institutionalized and legalized the crib sheet for *both the midterm and the final exams* in this course. You are allowed to use a legal crib sheet. My purpose is to reduce exam anxiety and to encourage good study habits. The rules are as follows:

- @ Both sides of a single 8 1/2" X 11" piece of paper may be used.
- @ Crib sheets must be written by hand--not typed--and signed.
- @ The crib sheet is to be turned in with the exam.

Extra Credit: Optional Term Paper

This optional extra-credit term paper will be due in class during the next-to-the-last week as indicated in our calendar of assignments. Since the assignment is entirely optional, there will be no need for extensions. If you do not have the paper, you will not be penalized in any way. Writing this paper can only help your final grade and cannot harm you at all.

Papers will be evaluated on their merit--extra credit is not given merely because papers were completed. Papers must be generated on the computer or typewritten. Use Times New Roman in 12-point type with one-inch margins all around. No cover sheet please. Simply type your name, the course name, the instructor's name, and the date, each item on its own line, single-spaced, in the upper right hand corner of page 1. Double space down to the paper's title. Double space thereafter. Follow either the MLA (Modern Language Association) or Chicago Manual of Style guidelines for the manuscript, citations, and works cited (bibliography). Grading will be based on content, organization, development, style, and correctness. Carefully proofread for spelling, typography, punctuation, and grammar.

Successful papers will earn bonus points to be applied to the score on the final exam, after the regular grades are computed. "A" papers get 6 points; "B" papers get 4 points; and "C" papers get 2 points. When bonus points are applied to the final exam, it can make a difference of an entire letter grade. Remember, it is up to you. No one has to do the assignment. However, those who carry it out should find the experience rewarding. We are looking for a 1750 word paper (about 7 typewritten pages) that meets the criteria below. Papers are due at the start of class on Monday, December 1. Late papers will not be accepted. Papers will be graded and returned to you at the final exam on Monday, December 22.

Subject. From our textbook "Living Folklore," turn to "Suggestions for Activities and Projects" on pages 275-276. Under "Personal Reflection" you will find five suggestions or writing assignments that focus on how you experience and respond to folklore. Choose one of the five suggestions for your essay.

Format. Papers should be word-processed, double spaced, in Times New Roman, 12-point font, and have one-inch margins. Your name and the name of the book you are analyzing should be placed in the upper right-hand corner of your first page. Be sure to place page numbers on each page. Please staple all pages together. Please do not use folders or binders, since they are too bulky.

Sources and Plagiarism. The paper should reflect your own analysis of the film in your own words. I do not expect you to use any outside sources. If you do use any sources for words or ideas, you must give them full credit in footnotes or endnotes. Plagiarism is a serious offense in this course and according to Rutgers University regulations. If you appropriate another person's ideas or words in any manner whether by restatement or direct quotation without acknowledging your source, you will commit plagiarism. The penalties for plagiarism in this course are as follows: a zero on any plagiarized writing, which may result in failure of the course and a report to the dean.

Classroom Etiquette

You should be considerate of your instructors and classmates. For your own benefit you should try to arrive on time for each class. If you are unavoidably late, please enter by the rear door so as not to disrupt everyone else's viewing. Again for your own benefit you should stay for the complete screening of each film. If something comes up such that you must leave early, speak to me about the situation beforehand, and leave by the rear entrance. Please turn off all cell phones, watch alarms and pagers and put them away during class. Please do not use cell phones to send or receive text messages during class. You may use a laptop computer during class only for taking notes in this course. Please do not use your laptop to work on other courses, check your email, or engage in other distracting activities. I reserve the right to forbid laptop usage if it is abused or if it distracts me or other students.

Advising

I will do my best to keep an eye on you and to call you out if I think you look like you need help, but there are a lot of you and just one of me. It is therefore really up to you to come to me if you need help--on anything. I come to class early not just to take attendance but also to be available to talk. I have brief office hours during the break, but we can set up appointments then for longer meetings at mutually convenient times. If you have course conflicts, I can arrange alternate meeting times, just ask. And don't be shy.

Advising is part of my job! I am happy to help you with course materials, paper and exam preparation, with planning your future, internships, picking a graduate school, and with navigating the Rutgers bureaucracy. Perhaps, most important, I'm a fairly good listener if you need someone safe to talk to, and I can help you find help if you need it.

Course Schedule

“Tradition is the illusion of permanence.”
--Woody Allen

Thursday, Sept 4	Introduction to Folklore
Monday, Sept 8	Introduction to Folklife Read “Living Folklore” Chapter 1, “Folklore,” pages 1-29 Read “Folklife Studies” from Sakai Resources Visit Website “Skansen” from Sakai
Thursday, Sept 11	Groups Read “Living Folklore” Chapter 2, “Groups,” pages 30-63 In Class Video: “The Amish: A People of Preservation” (1991) Visit Website “Mennonite Info” from Sakai
Monday, Sept 15	Tradition Read “Living Folklore” Chapter 3, “Tradition,” pages 64-93 In Class Video: “Dreams and Songs of the Noble Old” (1990) Visit Website “Folklife Center” from Sakai
Thursday, Sept 18	Traditional Music Class meets at State Theatre, 15 Livingston Avenue, New Brunswick Lecture/Demonstration by Dean Osborne, Kentucky Bluegrass Legend Kentucky School of Bluegrass & Traditional Music, Hyden, Kentucky
Monday, Sept 22	Ritual Read “Living Folklore” Chapter 4, “Ritual,” pages 94-126 In Class Video: “Buck Season at Bear Meadow Sunset” (1982)
Thursday, Sept 25	Performance I Read “Living Folklore” Chapter 5, “Performance,” pages 127-174 In Class Video: “The Cowboy Poets Live at Elko” (1994), Part One Visit Website “Cowboy Poetry” from Sakai

Monday, Sept 29	<p>Performance II Review “Living Folklore” Chapter 5, “Performance,” pages 127-174 In Class Video: “The Cowboy Poets Live at Elko” (1994), Part Two</p>
Thursday, October 2	<p>Approaches to Interpreting Folklore Read “Living Folklore” Ch 6, “Approaches to Interpreting Folklore,” pages 174-201 In Class Video: “Salamanders: A Night at the Phi Delt House” (1981) In Class Video: “Gandy Dancers: African American Railroad Workers” (1994)</p>
Monday, October 6	<p>Jersey Devil, Part One Read: “The Jersey Devil,” pages 15-72 In Class: Slide Presentation by AKG Visit Website “Jersey Devil” from Sakai</p>
Thursday, October 9	<p>Jersey Devil, Part Two Read “The Jersey Devil,” pages 73-114 In Class Video: “Mother Leeds’s 13th Child” (NJN Video)</p>
Monday, October 13	<p>Pine Barrens, Part One Read John McPhee, Chapters 1-4 Lecture on the book by AKG Read “Folklore in the Pine Barrens” from Sakai Resources</p>
Thursday, October 16	<p>Pine Barrens, Part Two Read John McPhee, Chapters 5-9 In Class Video: “My Pine Barrens Land” (NJN Video) Read “Foodways in the Pine Barrens” from Sakai Resources</p>
Monday, October 20	<p>Midterm Exam You will want to bring your legal crib sheet and a #2 lead pencil with eraser.</p>
Thursday, October 23	<p>Folk Art I Guest Presenter: Professor Michael Aaron Rockland In class video: “American Experience: Hearts and Hands” (1988) Read “Folk Art” from Sakai Resources</p>
Monday, October 27	<p>Folk Art II Slide Presentation by AKG. Folk art is usually thought of as the purely decorative or Representational items produced by traditional means. Visit Website “New York” from Sakai</p>
Thursday, October 30	<p>Holidays I Introductory PowerPoint presentation by AKG Read “All Around the Year,” Chapter One</p>
Monday, November 3	<p>Holidays II Read “All Around the Year,” Chapter Two In Class Video: “Haunted History of Halloween” (1997)</p>
Thursday, November 6	<p>Holidays III Read “All Around the Year,” Chapter Three In Class Video: “History of Thanksgiving” (1997)</p>
Monday, November 10	<p>Holidays IV Read “All Around the Year,” Chapter Four In Class Video: “Christmas Unwrapped” (1997)</p>

- Thursday, November 13 **Holidays V**
Read “All Around the Year,” Chapter Five
In Class Video: “Independence Day” (1997)
- Monday, November 17 **Folk Crafts**
PowerPoint Presentation by AKG. Folk crafts typically result in homemade objects that are primarily functional. Read “Folk Crafts and Art” from Sakai Resources.
- Thursday, November 20 **Folk Tools**
PowerPoint Presentation by AKG. Traditional craftsmen were responsible for producing tools and equipment for farm and home, ranging from horseshoes to ploughs.
- Monday, November 24 **Folk Architecture**
PowerPoint Presentation by AKG. Folk architecture, common or native in a given area, includes all traditional non-academic building types.
Read “Folk Architecture” from Sakai Resources.
- Tuesday, November 25 **Folk Costume**
PowerPoint Presentation by AKG. Folk costumes hold a prominent place in European folklife research and are often featured there in museums and festivals.
Read “Folk Costume” from Sakai Resources.
- Monday, December 1 **American Foodways**
PowerPoint Presentation by AKG. What, when, why and how we eat in America.
Food gathering and preparation How food expresses and shapes American values.
Read “Folk Cookery” from Sakai Resources.
- Thursday, December 4 **Folk Cookery**
PowerPoint Presentation by AKG. Folk cookery, or foodways, includes the entire process of traditional food handling and consumption.
- Monday, December 8 **Conclusions**
Summing up the course. What do we have that folk communities lack? What do they have that we have lost? What is needed for a society that is happy, healthy, and safe?

Final Examination is on Monday, December 22 from 9:00 am to 11:00 am
You will want to bring your legal crib sheet, a #2 lead pencil with eraser, and a ballpoint pen.

Fall Semester Advisory

It is characteristic of life at Rutgers that there are many competing demands for your time and attention. However, you should bear in mind that you and you alone are responsible for keeping up with the assigned work in this course. When the semester ends with the final examination, work for this course is *complete*. Therefore, please be advised that once the course has ended, there will be absolutely, positively no further opportunities for “make up” exams or “extra credit” work to improve your grade. You may not rewrite your papers or take an exam over. Such after-the-fact activities are manifestly unfair to those in the course who have done the work all along. The time to work on this course is *now*, not after the class has been brought to a conclusion.