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Spring, 2009  
Office hours, Wednesdays 9:30-12 and by  
appointment

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### ON THE ROAD: MOBILITY IN AMERICA

“Oh public road, . . . You express me better than I can express myself.”  
[Walt Whitman, “Song of the Open Road”]

“The highway was their home and movement their means of expression.”  
[John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*]

“In the Roman Empire. . . all roads led to Rome. In America, all roads lead to  
other roads.”  
[Phil Patton, *Open Road*]

“A restless temper seems . . . one of the distinctive traits of this people”  
[Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*]

“We have been and are still today the most mobile people on the face of the earth”  
[George W. Pierson, *The Moving American*]

“We find that staying in one place more than three months is intolerable.”  
[Richard Burton speaking of his life with Elizabeth Taylor]

“When America needs a better idea, Ford puts it on wheels.”  
[Ford commercial]

“Americans are always moving on”  
[Stephen Vincent Benet]

“There isn’t a train I wouldn’t take, no matter where it’s going.”  
[Edna St. Vincent Millet]

“Go West, Young Man”  
[Horace Greeley]

“Roots? Roots are not modern. That’s a peasant concept: soil and roots.”  
[a character in Saul Bellow’s *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*]

“The American. . . is devoured with a passion for locomotion. He must come and go.”  
[John F. Kennedy]

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### BOOKS

All books, except *Snowshoeing Through Sewers*, are available at the Douglass-Cook Bookstore at the corner of Nichol Avenue and Lipman Drive. *Snowshoeing* will be distributed in class at the special author's rate.

Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*

Tom Robbins, *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*

Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*

Michael Aaron Rockland, *Snowshoeing Through Sewers*

Angus K. Gillespie & Michael Aaron Rockland, *Looking for America on the New Jersey Turnpike*

Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool Aid Acid Test*

**Films:** We will be seeing quite a number of feature films in this course. They are just as important as the readings. With the exception of my own film, *Three Days on Big City Waters*, all will be on reserve in the Douglass Library media/music room. They may also be rented and seen privately if you prefer. The films will be on reserve for two weeks prior to the day they are discussed in class, the day indicated in the syllabus. The hours of the media/music room are substantial. They are:

Mondays-Thursdays, 9 a.m.-10 p.m.

Fridays, 9 a.m.-5:45 p.m.

Saturdays, 10 a.m.-5:45 p.m.

Sundays, 12 noon-8 p.m.

**Electronic Packet:** There will be a substantial number of readings besides the six books. They are on electronic reserve. You can access them by clicking on Libraries, then reserve, then my name, and then the number of our course. Be sure you get the number of the course and section correctly. I have another course with readings on electronic reserve and there are also other sections of 301, our American Studies topics course. Ours is section 01. I urge you to print out everything in the electronic packet **now** and put it into a folder. Always have in class with you those readings from the packet we will be discussing on a particular day. It goes without saying that the same thing applies to our six books, that you have them in class with you on the days they are to be discussed.

### SYLLABUS

Wed. Jan. 21 INTRODUCTION: Mobility and American Things

(one page handout)

song: Bruce Springsteen's "Born to Run"

Mon, Jan 26 Mobility and American Things (continued)

song: Dave Brubeck quartet, "Take the 'A' Train"

read: "Mobility in America" by Michael Rockland (electronic packet)

Film, in class “Three Days on Big City Waters”

Wed. Jan. 28

CLASSIC WORKS

Song: Simon and Garfunkel, “America”

read: Henry David Thoreau, “Walking.” (1851)  
 from *The Life Story of Daniel Boone* (anonymous, 1856)  
 Walt Whitman, “Song of the Open Road (1856)

CLASSIC WORKS II.

Mon. Feb. 2 Song: Carole King “So Far Away”

read: David Potter, “Abundance, Mobility and Status,” from *People of Plenty* (1954)  
 Lewis Mumford, “The Highway and the City” (1958)  
 Vance Packard, “A Society of Torn Roots,” from *A Nation of Strangers* (1972)  
 Michael Aaron Rockland, Preface and first chapter, “Wheel Estate”  
 from *Homes on Wheels* (1980--Okay, I wrote this so it isn’t a  
 “classic work”)

Wed. Feb.4

THE “DEFECT” IN ENDLESS MOBILITY

read: Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*

Mon.,Feb.

FILM DISCUSSION

Song: Bruce Springsteen, “Thunder Road”

film: *Stagecoach*

[reminder: you are to have seen this film prior  
 to class time on Monday, February 9. Otherwise, you won’t  
 have a clue what we’re talking about. And this applies to all  
 all other films]

Wed., Feb. 11

FILM DISCUSSION

Songs: Music by Woody Guthrie

film: *Bound for Glory*

Mon. Feb. 16

FILM DISCUSSION

film: *The Grapes of Wrath*

read: excerpt from *Travels with Charlie*

Wed. Feb. 18

OUR BRIDGE

read: excerpts from *The George Washington Bridge: Poetry in Steel*

Mon. Feb. 23            FILM DISCUSSION

film: *The Great Smokey Roadblock*

Wed. Feb. 25        WOMEN AND MOBILITY

read: Tom Robbins, *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*

Mon. March 2        WOMEN AND MOBILITY II: FILM DISCUSSION

film: *Thelma and Louise*

Wed. March 4        FILM DISCUSSION

film: *Easy Rider*

Mon. March 9        FILM DISCUSSION

film: *Bonnie and Clyde*

**Note: There will also be, on Monday, March 9, a midterm quiz based on the first half of the course. The quiz will cover all readings, films, and lectures up through and including *Midnight Cowboy*. Quiz must be taken this day, no makeups.**

Wed. March 11        URBAN ADVENTURE I.

read: some of The New York adventures, chapters 1, 2, from *Snowshoeing Through Sewers*, by Michael Aaron Rockland

Mon. March 23        URBAN ADVENTURE II.

read: some of the New Jersey adventures, chapters 5,6, 8 in *Snowshoeing Through Sewers*

Wed. March 25        URBAN ADVENTURE III.

read: The Philadelphia adventures, chapters 9,10 in *Snowshoeing Through Sewers*

Mon. March 30        OUR ROAD

read: first half of *Looking for America on the New Jersey Turnpike* by Gillespie and Rockland. Guest lecturer this day, Professor Angus Kress Gillespie

Wed. April 1 NO CLASS THIS DAY

your assignment: finish reading *Looking for America on the New Jersey Turnpike*

Mon. April 6 OUR ROAD II.

*Looking for America on the New Jersey Turnpike* (continued)

Wed. April 8 FILM DISCUSSION

film: *Paris, Texas*

Mon. April 13 ZEN AND THE ROAD

excerpt from *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, by Robert Pirsig

also, read chapter ch. 4, "Zen and the Art of Biking Route One" from *Snowshoeing Through Sewers*

Wed. April 15 &  
Mon. April 20 THE FIFTIES

read: Jack Kerouac, *On The Road*

Wed. April 22 FILM DISCUSSION

film: *Midnight Cowboy*

**Note: Term Papers are due without fail in class on this date. Late papers, whatever the excuse, will be penalized. Term papers will be returned at our final examination, May 12.**

Mon. April 27 HITTING THE ROAD

read: except from *Blue Highways*, by William Least Heat Moon

Wed, April 29 THE SIXTIES

read: Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*

Mon. May 4

THE SIXTIES (continued)

*The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*

**Final Examination, Tuesday, May 12, 12-3 p.m. in our customary room.**

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GROUND RULES AND REQUIREMENTS

**Attendance:** I believe that fully attending a class is important and excessive absences will influence your final grade, not to mention your scoring on the exams. I will arrive in class a few minutes early and begin taking attendance. Those who come in late should be sure to see me and sign in before I go out the door.

**Class Participation:** Though ours is not a small class, those who regularly participate in discussions will get extra credit towards their final grade.

**Grading:** Grading will be based on your midterm quiz, your final examination, which will consist of a quiz on the second half of the semester as well as a blue book essay or two, and your term project, which will be the most important component of your grade.

**Term Projects**

I would like you to study some aspect of American mobility and how it reflects American life, ideas, and values broadly speaking. Below are a number of ideas. These are only meant to be suggestive. The choice of topic is entirely up to you. Feel free to meet with me during my office hours if you are in doubt as to the validity of your topic. Term projects should be something like 10-12 pages long.

Mobility as a theme in American music

American modern dance as the embodiment of American ideas of mobility

The American love affair with the automobile

Mobility and the frontier in American history

Gendering mobility: differing expectations/ behavior of American men & women

Race, ethnicity, and mobility

Social class and mobility

American painting and American mobility

Mobility and American architecture—e.g., the strip mall, Las Vegas

Reconciling the desire for mobility and the desire for roots in American life

A study of selective cowboy or trucker movies

Attitudes towards mobility in the U.S. vs. Europe or Asia

Your own experiences on the road and what you learned from them (but let's talk if you choose this one. I want to insure your experiences have been extraordinary

**Plagiarism** is a very serious academic offense. At a minimum, those who use the words and work of others without attribution will receive an "F" in this course. Plagiarism is intellectual theft. The maximum penalty is expulsion from the university. Just don't do it. If you are utilizing the work of others—and this is perfectly acceptable—just be sure when quoting or paraphrasing to give credit where credit is due. We all depend on the work of others. Just say thank you, which is, in effect, what a footnote is. As for the form of the citations, I do not care what form you use as long as you are logical and consistent.

