

## *Course Syllabus*

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### **Course Information**

#### **AMS 3302/501: AMERICAN CULTURES**

**(23912):**

Spring, 2013

Class Meeting Time: Mon. and Wed. 5:30 – 6:45 PM

Class Location: HH 2.502

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### **Professor Contact Information**

Dr. Dachang Cong

Office Location: HH 2.302

Office Hours: Tu. and Thur. 1 - 2:30 PM; Wed. 4:00 – 5:00 PM

dccong@utdallas.edu

972-883-2297

And by appointment

### **Course Description**

The goal of this course is to gain a thorough understanding of mainstream American culture (especially the economic, social, and political aspects) and various subcultures from an interdisciplinary perspective. The course focuses on the new realities of American society and economy, such as corporate behavior, the dilemma of middle-class and working-class families, and the interaction between wealth and democracy. It studies how American society copes with economic uncertainty and financial risks. The course also examines the mania of consumerism and the relentless cost-cutting in Corporate America under the pressure of Wall Street. Other topics include American values, ethnic groups, institutions, culture regions, poverty, and social problems. The instructor emphasizes both theories and field observation. Each student is required to write a study report and complete a midterm exam. Class participation is essential. There are no prerequisites.

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### **Student Learning Objectives/Outcomes**

Upon completion of the course, the student should be able:

1. To gain a thorough understanding of mainstream American culture (especially the economic, social, and political aspect) and various subcultures from an interdisciplinary perspective.
2. To identify and describe new realities and new changes in American society and economy.
3. To offer critical and constructive comments on important issues (economic disparities, consumerism, financial risks, democracy, and economic crisis).

## Required Textbooks and Materials

- Frank, Robert.  
The Darwin Economy.
- Frank, Robert.  
The High-Beta Rich.
- Hostetler, John.  
Amish Society.

## Suggested Course Materials

The instructor will suggest a number of web sites, TV programs, and movies.

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## Assignments & Academic Calendar

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|------------|---|---|
| <b>I</b>   | <b>Orientation</b>  | Jan. 14-16                                |
|            | <b>Understanding American Cultures: Anthropological and Sociological perspectives</b> |   |
|            | <b>Everyday Observation of American Society</b>                                       |   |
| <b>II</b>  |   | <b>Decoding Wealth and Capitalism (1)</b> |
|            | <b>Reading American Cultures (1)</b>  | Jan. 23                                   |
|            | Frank. <u>The High-Beta Rich</u> , Part I.  | Jan. 28                                   |
|            |   | and 30                                    |
| <b>III</b> | <b>Decoding Wealth and Capitalism (2)</b>   | Feb. 4 - 6                                |
|            | <b>Reading American Cultures (2)</b>  |   |
|            | Frank. <u>The High-Beta Rich</u> , Part II.   |   |
| <b>IV</b>  |   | <b>American Values</b>                    |
|            | <b>Decoding Wealth and Capitalism (3)</b>   | Feb. 11 - 13                              |
|            | <b>Reading American Cultures (3)</b>  |   |
|            | Frank. <u>The High-Beta Rich</u> , Part III.  |   |
| <b>V</b>   | <b>The Mass Media</b>   | Feb. 18 - 20                              |
|            | <b>Decoding Wealth and Capitalism (4)</b>   |   |
|            | <b>Reading American Culture (4)</b>   |   |
|            | Frank. <u>The High-Beta Rich</u> , Part IV.   |   |

**VI**

**Culture Regions**

Feb. 25 - 27

**Deciphering American Economy (1)**  
**Understanding Wall Street (1)**  
**Midterm**

Frank. The Darwin Economy, Chapters 1-3.

**VII Social Stratification: Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Class**  
**Deciphering American Economy (2)**  
**Understanding Wall Street (2)**

Mar. 4 - 6

Frank. The Darwin Economy, Chapters 4-6.

**VIII Politics and Law**  
**Deciphering American Economy (3)**  
**Understanding Wall Street (3)**

Mar. 18 - 20

Frank. The Darwin Economy, Chapters 7-9.

**IX**

**Economy and  
Technology**

Mar. 25 - 27

**Deciphering American Economy (4)**  
**Understanding Wall Street (4)**

Frank. The Darwin Economy, Chapters 10-12.

**X**

**Family and Kinship**

Apr. 1 - 3

**Understanding the Amish (1)**  
**Decoding California and Texas (1)**

Cong. "Amish Factionalism and Technological Change." In Ethnology, 31(3): 205-218.  
Hostetler. Amish Society, Chapters 1-5.

**XI**

**Religion, Education,  
and Wellness**

Apr. 8 - 10

**Understanding the Amish (2)**  
**Decoding California and Texas (2)**

Hostetler. Amish Society, Chapters 6-10.

- XII Cultural and Social Change** Apr. 15 - 17  
**Understanding the Amish (3)**  
**The Working Class**  
**Decoding California and Texas (3)**

Hostetler. Amish Society, Chapters 11-14.

- XIII Untangling the New Economic Realities** Apr. 22 - 26  
**Understanding the Amish (4)**  
**Decoding California and Texas (4)**  
**The Poor and the Near Poor**

Hostetler. Amish Society, Chapters 15-18.

- XIV The Digital Revolution** Apr. 29 and May 1  
**The Middle Class**  
**Conclusion**

- XV Study Report Due** May. 7

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**Grading Policy**

Each student is required to write a term paper. The paper is based on original/ethical ethnography. He or she is also required to complete two exams (essay questions).

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|------------------------|--------------------|
| 1) Study report        | 60% of final grade |
| 2) Midterm exam        | 20% of final grade |
| 3) Class Participation | 20% of final grade |

Poor attendance and late work will cause a reduction in the final grade. The instructor will make a decision on the reduction according to the degree/nature of poor attendance and belatedness.

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**Course & Instructor Policies**

Attentiveness to lectures is required.

Electronic gadgets should be turned off in classroom.

Class participation is essential. Late work will impact on the grade negatively.

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*These descriptions and timelines are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.*

**For UTD rules and regulations, please visit  
<http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies>**