

**AMS 3302: American Cultures**  
**SCL 1.204, MW 5.30-6.45**

Professor Andrew Busch  
Office: 2.142 HH  
Email: [amb163130@utdallas.edu](mailto:amb163130@utdallas.edu) Phone: 6277  
Office hours: M 11-2

**Course Description**

American culture is relatively unique precisely because it is able to assimilate numerous cultures while also allowing for citizens to express unique cultural systems, beliefs, and values. Yet Americans of different backgrounds and ideologies also face different challenges and may interact with “mainstream” culture in different ways. As such, an important part of American culture is that it is always contested, unstable, and subject to many interpretations; different people can experience American culture in radically different ways. Additionally, the idea of culture itself is multifaceted. It can refer to both lived experience and the symbols of meaning (as well as popular artifacts like sports, music, film, and TV) that help humans organize and understand their lives and the societies that structure them.

The goal of the course, then, is to understand how different American cultures develop and interact, and how cultural change affects other aspects of life in the United States. We investigate American using a variety of perspectives, from both mainstream cultures and subcultures. We also employ interdisciplinary methodologies, meaning we will draw from various disciplinary traditions (e.g. history, geography, sociology, economics), and synthesize them to attain holistic understanding of topics. We will also give historical context to contemporary social issues such as racial relations; environmental degradation and management; economic growth and decline; and migration and citizenship.

**Course Objectives**

AMS 3302 serves as a gateway course into humanities and introduces students to the field of American Studies, emphasizing perspectives and skills that enrich students professionally and intellectually. As such the course is more than just a survey of American culture. This course is designed with three interrelated goals in mind: (1) To explore the complexities and contradictions underlying American society and culture, looking at how (or if) disparate Americans have shaped a shared American identity and culture, (2) To introduce students to important issues, significant works, and interpretive methods of American Studies as an interdisciplinary discipline, and (3) To experiment with cultural interpretation and learn to think critically and analytically about issues of identity, community, culture, and nation. The course is not intended to be a comprehensive survey of the American experience. Rather, it is intended to examine a selection of central ideas and experiences that illuminate a larger dialogue about American society and culture.

With these goals and themes in mind, students will be encouraged to think broadly and synthetically about the ideas and experiences that have shaped American society as it has evolved, primarily over the last century. And they will be encouraged to share their ideas and experiences with others in the class and the larger university community. Primary emphasis will be placed on discussion, analytical thinking, close textual readings, written and oral

communication, and cultural analysis. How do scholars of American Studies, History, Sociology, and Geography conceptualize and explain American culture? How do they synthesize and interpret a range of texts, images, and perspectives? How do they develop interpretive arguments? The main concern of this class is to provide students with the perspective and skills to reflect on American society as it has emerged up to the present day and to be able to see various cultures as products of human interaction. American Studies majors develop skills and perspectives that prepare them for a wide variety of careers, including law, business, journalism, teaching, writing, and many others. Above all this class, and American Studies more broadly, cultivates critical thinking, broad-based intellectual perspectives, and high-level communication skills that are valuable to students as professionals, intellectuals, and citizens.

### Skills

*Critical Thinking:* Through assigned reading, class discussion and debate, and the writing of analytical essays, students will learn to: (1) synthesize and interpret texts; (2) compare, contrast, and evaluate arguments in terms of underlying assumptions, logic, and the reliability of supporting data; and (3) apply, with accuracy and insight, scholarly concepts, theories, and debates to real world events.

*Engaging with Other Learners/ Communication:* No matter your field of emphasis, written and oral communication are vital skills for success and enrichment. Throughout the semester, students will be expected to actively engage in class discussion of assigned readings, work in small groups to analyze and apply course material, present their work to the class, and provide feedback to their peers. As a result of the material covered in the course and the interactive methods of engaging it, students will improve their **ability to communicate and act respectfully across cultural and linguistic differences**.

*Reflecting and Acting:* This course encourages students to reflect on their positions as US citizens or guests, and how that positioning is affected by membership, or residency, in the United States. Students will come to better understand the nature of the challenges and opportunities they confront in diverse people in the US, and **their place and influence in that world** as citizens and consumers.

### Learning Outcomes

Understand American cultures and their relationship to social, economic, political, and geographical themes and events throughout recent US history.

Identify, assess, and analyze scholarly arguments about why American cultures have evolved in a particular manner and about their relationship to broad societal trends.

Articulate arguments about American cultures and US society orally and in writing.

Develop interdisciplinary skills and perspectives, including critical thinking, information literacy, cultural awareness, and interpersonal communication (especially writing).

Be prepared to be more informed as citizens regarding public policy and be ready to contribute to the well-being of your communities and to the greater good by being civically engaged.

### **Required Readings**

There are no books to purchase. Your readings will come from a list of PDFs and internet links I've compiled on our class website.

However, you MUST purchase a package of index cards ASAP. The index cards will be used to answer daily reading quizzes which will be used to judge your attendance and participation.

### **Assignments**

All the assignments listed below will be discussed further in class. Each one has its percent weight in terms of your final grade listed next to it. All written assignments need to use one inch margins, 12 point font, and be double spaced. Papers should conform to MLA or Chicago Manual of Style standards for format and citation of sources. Please consult me, a librarian, and/or the writing center

<http://www.utdallas.edu/studentsuccess/writing/index.html> for assistance.

-Exams(midterm 20%, final 20% - 40% total) You will take two exams throughout the semester, one midterm(on October 17) and one take home final. The midterm will be a standard blue book exam. You will have one hour (60 minutes) to finish it. It will consist of a mix of ID questions, designed to test your ability to recognize and assess important people, events, and places; and essay questions, which are designed to test your analytical ability regarding larger class themes. The final will be a take-home essay similar to an argument paper. Each exam will cover half the course, keeping in mind the first two week's material; the final will not be comprehensive.

-Argument Papers (two papers – first at 20% and second at 20% – 40% total) One of the main goals of AMS 3302 is to improve writing skills. You will write and turn in two short (3-4 p) papers. The papers will be related to class material and will ask students to analyze urban issues, social issues, geography, landscape, or something else related to the class. The paper should be analytical rather than merely descriptive, and will contain a thesis statement supported by evidence and logic. I will be giving out a handout detailing what the papers should entail and address, and we will discuss the papers in detail during class.

-Pop Reading Quizzes (10%) On four days throughout the semester you will be given a pop quiz on the readings for that day. The pop quizzes won't be announced. You may use notes from readings but not the text itself. Each of these quizzes will be worth 2.5% of the overall grade, for 10% total. These quizzes cannot be made up for any reason unless you've discussed an excused absence with the instructor before the class.

-Attendance/Participation (10%) This is a measure of your attendance and the easiest way to accumulate points in the course. Class discussions and readings are imperative to students' growth in this course. Periodically you will be asked to free write about daily topics or connect daily topics to larger themes. There will be short reading quizzes at the instructor's discretion throughout the semester and homework (not listed on syllabus). You will also be asked to assess films and other visual material and to conduct peer review sessions and discussions with your classmates. Finally, oral communication and working with others are important components of the class and will be assessed here. On days you don't attend you will get no points for participation.

You have one free, unexcused absence. After that, I will begin deducting points from your grade. If you miss five (5) classes unexcused, you will receive a zero in attendance (and obviously your participation score will suffer greatly). If you miss eight (8) classes unexcused, you will automatically fail the course. There are no exceptions to this rule. Keep in mind there are only 27 class meetings this semester.

## **Grading Policy**

Late assignments – Assignments turned in after the due date and time are considered late. Your assignments will be due on the day noted on the syllabus under “Course Schedule” below at the beginning of class. Assignments not turned at the beginning of class will be considered late and will have one full grade deducted for each day late (so from an 86 to a 76). Assignments will not be accepted after two full days late (for example, if the assignment is due on Wednesday and it is not turned in by Friday) it will be recorded as a zero.

Exam make ups – Exam make ups MUST be scheduled before the exam. Any missed exams not accounted for before the exam will be recorded as zero with no exceptions. If you are going to miss an exam you must consult directly with Instructor Andrew Busch at least two days before the exam, and you must have documentation as to why you are missing the exam.

Grade changes – You must wait at least 24 hours after receiving a graded exam or paper before meeting to discuss a grade change. After 24 hours you can request a meeting with the instructor for up to four days. After this period you may not meet with the instructor to request a grade change. If you do want a meeting, be sure to have an argument prepared as to why your grade should be changed.

A+ 98-100; A 92-98; A- 90-92

B+ 88-90; B 82-88; B- 80-82

C+ 78-80; C 72-78; C- 70-72

D+ 68-70; D 62-68; D- 60-62

F >60

## **Academic Integrity**

Turning in work that is not your own, or any other form of scholastic dishonesty, will result in a major course penalty, possibly failure of the course.

## **Accommodations**

Accommodations are available for students who qualify. Students must provide paperwork from UT-Dallas directly to the instructor in order to be eligible. Please visit:

<http://www.utdallas.edu/studentaccess/> for more information.

## **Technology in the Classroom**

While I prefer no cell phones, laptops, or tablets in the class, some students feel more comfortable using these devices for class activities such as notetaking. Therefore, I allow these devices but reserve the right to confiscate any device being used for non-class purposes and to deduct participation points for any such use.

## **Comet Creed**

*This creed was voted on by the UT Dallas student body in 2014. It is a standard that Comets choose to live by and encourage others to do the same:*

“As a Comet, I pledge honesty, integrity, and service in all that I do.”

## **UT Dallas Syllabus Policies and Procedures**

The information contained in the following link constitutes the University's policies and procedures segment of the course syllabus.

Please go to <http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies> for these policies.

***The descriptions and timelines contained in this syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.***

## **Weekly Schedule**

### **Week One (August 22 and 24): Understanding Cultures**

**Mon:** Intro and Syllabus, no readings

**Wed:** *Read:* Cronon, "Liberal Education – 'Only Connect'"; Williams, "Culture is Ordinary"

### **Unit One: Race and Urban Culture**

### **Week Two (Aug. 29 and 31): The Enduring Significance of Race in America**

**Mon:** *Read:* Coates, "Near Certainty"

<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/07/the-near-certainty-of-anti-police-violence/490541/> ; Vance, "Hillbilly Elegy"

<http://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/trump-us-politics-poor-whites/> ; "Trump," [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/08/12/a-massive-new-study-debunks-a-widespread-theory-for-donald-trumps-success/?tid=sm\\_fb](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/08/12/a-massive-new-study-debunks-a-widespread-theory-for-donald-trumps-success/?tid=sm_fb)

**Wed:** *Read:* Jackson, "Baby Boom and the Age of Subdivision"

### **Week Three (September 7): Cultures of Plenty/Cultures of Naught 1**

**Mon:** \*NO CLASS\* Happy Labor Day!

**Wed:** *Read:* Gans, "The Levittowners" and Cohen, "Shopping Centers"

### **Week Four (Sept. 12 and 14): Cultures of Plenty/Cultures of Naught 2**

**Mon:** *Read:* Hirsch, "Massive Resistance in the Urban North"

**Wed:** *Read:* Wilson, "From Institutional to Jobless Ghettos" and Sugrue, "A Dream Still Deferred," [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/27/opinion/27Sugrue.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/27/opinion/27Sugrue.html?_r=0) ; and "The Rise and Fall of Detroit's Middle Class" <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-rise-and-fall-of-detroits-middle-class> ; Badger, "Baltimore"

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/08/10/baltimore-shows-how-historic-segregation-shapes-biased-policing-today/?tid=sm\\_tw](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/08/10/baltimore-shows-how-historic-segregation-shapes-biased-policing-today/?tid=sm_tw)

### **Week Five (Sept. 19 and 21): Cultural Response to Crisis: The Rise of Hip Hop**

**Mon:** *Read:* Rose, "All Aboard the Night Train"

**Wed:** *Read:* Rose, "Prophets of Rage"

### **Unit Two: Environment and Economy**

### **Week Six (Sept. 26 and 28): Ideas and Ideals**

**Mon:** *Read:* Muir, "Save the Redwoods"

[http://www.yosemite.ca.us/john\\_muir\\_writings/save\\_the\\_redwoods.html](http://www.yosemite.ca.us/john_muir_writings/save_the_redwoods.html) and Wooster, "Thoreau and Wilderness"

**Wed:** *Read:* Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness"

**\*PAPER ONE DUE WED. Sept. 28 at the beginning of class.**

**Week Seven (October 3 and 5): Industrial Capitalism and the Environment**

**Mon:** *Read:* Tarr, "The City as Artifact"

**Wed:** *Read:* Olmsted, "Public Parks" and Riis, "How the Other Half Lives"

**Week Eight (Oct. 10 and 12): Postwar America – the Rise of Green**

**Mon:** *Read:* Packard, "Ever-Mounting Consumption"

<http://krishikosh.egranth.ac.in/bitstream/1/2027517/1/HS1273.pdf> and Carson, "Silent Spring"

**Wed:** *Read:* Rome, "Give Earth a Chance"

**Week Nine (Oct. 17 and 19): Whose Environment?**

**Mon: MIDTERM QUIZ**

**Wed:** *Read:* Pulido, "Environment and Positionality"; Sze, "Toxic Soup Redux"

<http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/Sze/>;

**Week Ten (Oct. 24 and 26): Sustainable Cultures**

**Mon:** *Read:* Grey, "Ten Years of Smart Growth"

**Wed:** *Read:* Long, "Sustainability Fix"

**\*Paper Two due next Wednesday, November 2\***

**Unit Three: Global Cultures and American Places**

**Week Eleven (Oct. 31 and Nov. 2): Immigration #1**

**Mon:** *Read:* Johnson, "Trump" <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2016/08/05/donald-trump-now-says-even-legal-immigrants-are-a-security-threat/> ; Graham, "Obama"

<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/06/immigration-advocates-place-their-faith-in-obama/394388/> ; Desipio, "Part One"

**Wed:** *Read:* Gorn, "Goodbye Boys, I Die a True American"

**\*Paper Two due Wednesday, Nov. 2 at the beginning of Class\***

**Week Twelve (Nov. 7 and 9): Neoliberalism and Economic Globalization**

**Mon:** *Read:* Steger, "The Economic Dimensions of Globalization" and Ferguson and Mansbach, "From the Cold War to 21<sup>st</sup> Century Globalization"

**Wed:** *Read:* Harvey, "Freedom's Just another Word"

**Week Thirteen (Nov. 14 and 16): Immigration #2**

**Mon:** *Read:* Desipio, "Part Two"

**Wed:** *Read:* Ritzer, "Global Flow of Migrants"

**Week Fourteen: \*NO CLASS\* Happy Thanksgiving!**

**Week Fifteen (Nov. 28 and 30): Assimilation and Belonging**

**Mon:** *Read:* Kivisto, "Assimilation: Historical Perspective and Contemporary Reframing"

**Wed:** *Read:* Yu, "Los Angeles and American Studies in a Pacific World of Migration"

**Week Sixteen (Dec. 5 and 7): Transnationalism and Citizenship/Wrap Up**

**Mon:** *Read:* Kivisto, “Transnationalism and the Persistence of Homeland Ties”

**Wed:** *Read:* Ferguson and Mansbach, “The Global Versus the Local”

**\*Final Paper prompt email on Monday, Dec. 5 and due in my office, Monday, Dec. 12 by 3 pm.**