

American Studies 423
The Search for Community

Spring 2006
M 4:00-6:50pm
EC011

Instructor: Dr. Carrie Lane Chet
Office Hours: M 9-11am, W 12-2, or by appointment
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Course Description:

This upper-level seminar offers an interdisciplinary exploration of the concept of community and its role in American culture. Drawing on works from anthropology, sociology, history, fiction, and film, this course explores what constitutes community, how communities vary in form and function, and what draws people into and away from various social groupings. Readings concern groups as diverse as Star Trek fans, unemployed autoworkers, Jewish senior citizens, rural farmers, suburban families, and Appalachian miners. These communities are examined on their own terms and within the wider context of American cultural and political life. Students investigate individual disciplines' methodological and theoretical approaches to the study of community and the advantages and challenges of interdisciplinary work through close and critical reading of course texts, vibrant class discussion, and extensive writing.

Required Texts:

Carol Stack, *Call to Home: African Americans Reclaim the Rural South*

Kai Erikson, *Everything in Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood*

Setha Low, *Behind the Gates: Life, Security, and the Pursuit of Happiness in Fortress America*

Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*

Additional Required Readings in Packet

Books for this course are available for purchase at Little Professor Book Center (725 N. Placentia). I do not require a specific edition of any of these books, so feel free to purchase used copies of older editions. The course packet is available at CopyCo (2438 E. Chapman). All books and readings are also available on reserve at the library.

Course Requirements:

The success of this course depends on your contributions as seminar participants. I expect that you will come to class having completed all assigned reading for that day and prepared with questions and comments for class discussion. Attendance is required at every seminar, and any absence must either be cleared in advance or be the result of serious, documented extenuating circumstances.

Weekly Reading Response: Each week, each student will email me at least one question/comment in response to that week's readings. These questions must be emailed to me by noon on Monday.

Presentation on Readings: Each student will select one week in which to make a short presentation on the week's readings. These presentations are **not** summaries of the readings. Instead, each presenter will point out the work's central themes and situate them within broader debates around American communities. He or she will then offer a few thought-provoking questions to kick off class discussion. When two or more students share responsibility for the presentation, the responsibility for the presentation will be shared equally among all presenters.

Presentation, Short Paper, Final Paper: In addition to required course readings, each student will read one additional study of their choosing on an American community. This community can be real or fictional, historical or contemporary. Students can select a study from the list provided at the end of this syllabus or choose another text with the professor's approval. Each student will write a brief **3-5 page paper** describing the community they have selected and the work(s) in which they read about it. They will then make a brief **presentation** to the class describing that community and their interest in it. On the last day of class, students will submit a **10-page paper** in which they introduce the reader to the community in question (this section can borrow from your short paper), summarize and critique their key source or sources, and consider that community and community study in relation to key themes and debates from the course. I also hope that over the course of the semester students will serve as in-class "experts" on their community, expanding class discussions with references to and examples from their community study.

Meeting with Professor: Each student is required to meet with the professor outside of seminar to discuss the community they have selected to write upon and their plans for the final paper.

Email and Blackboard: I will communicate with you by email throughout the semester, so you need to regularly check whatever email account Blackboard has on record for you. I will also add readings, list, and updates to the Blackboard site, so be sure to check it regularly.

Graduate Student Requirements: Graduate students enrolled in this course will research an American community of their own choosing from any historical era or geographic region and prepare an independent research paper of at least twenty pages. Early in the semester all graduate students will submit a brief research prospectus and meet individually with the instructor to discuss their project. At specified deadlines graduate students will also submit an annotated bibliography and paper outline. Graduate students will also meet briefly with the professor each week either before or after seminar, depending on students' schedules.

I reserve the right to modify and add assignments throughout the semester.

Grading Procedures:

In grading your assignments and exams, I will pay close attention to both substance and form (grammar, spelling, organization, and clarity of expression). In evaluating the substance of an essay, I will examine whether you have demonstrated a critical understanding of course materials **and** presented and substantiated a coherent thesis or argument.

Presentation on Readings	10%
Short Paper	15%
Presentation on Community	5%
Final Paper	40%
Seminar Participation	30%

A = 90-100%

B = 80-89%

C = 70-79%

D = 60-69%

F = 59% or lower

The +/- grading system will be used. No extra credit will be offered for this course. Keep all graded assignments so that any discrepancies can be easily and fairly straightened out.

Academic dishonesty (including plagiarism, cheating, and other violations of academic integrity) will not be tolerated under any circumstances and will result in a failing grade on that exam/assignment, as well as possible removal from the course or suspension from the university.

For more information on the American Studies Department, see: <http://hss.fullerton.edu/amst/>.

Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

1/30 **Introduction: What Is a Community?**

2/6 **American Community Studies**

Bauman, "Overture" and "The Agony of Tantalus" in *Community* [P]

Warren, Introduction and Chapter One, in *The Community in America* [P]

Bender, "The Meaning of Community" and "Social Theory and the Problem of Community," in *Community and Social Change in America* [P]

Assignment: Bring a news article on an American community to class; be prepared to discuss

2/13 **Community and Individualism**

Erikson, "Villages" (1998) [P]

Dudley, "The Problem of Community in Rural America" [P]

Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart* (excerpts) [P]

2/20 **PRESIDENT'S DAY: NO CLASS**

Use this time to read ahead in *Call to Home*.

This week: Individual meetings with Dr. Chet

2/27 **The Power of Community**

Stack, *Call to Home*, Preface & Ch. 1-4

FILM: *Number Our Days*

3/6 **Kin, Community, and Migration**

Stack, *Call to Home*, Ch. 5-8 & Afterword

3/13 **IN-CLASS PRESENTATIONS ON COMMUNITIES**

Assignment: SHORT PAPER DUE

3/20 **Community in Crisis**

Erikson, *Everything in Its Path*, Intro. & Part I

*****SPRING BREAK*****

4/3 **Shared Histories, Shared Cultures**

Erikson, *Everything in Its Path*, Part II

FILM: *Roger & Me*

4/10 **Destruction of Community**

Erikson, *Everything in Its Path*, Part III

4/17 **The Search for Community**

Low, *Behind the Gates*, pp. 1-152

FILM: *Trekkies*

4/24 **Race, Class, and Community in America Today**

Low, *Behind the Gates*, pp. 153-232

5/1 **Race, Class, and Community in America's Future**

Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, pp. 1-148

5/8 **The Future of Community**

Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, 149-295

TV: Star Trek episode, "The Apple"

5/15 **Wrap-Up and Feedback**

Assignment: FINAL PAPERS DUE

[P] designates readings included in the course packet.

Community Studies

Feel free to choose a study from this list or to select another text about an American community of your choosing. If you do choose something not on the list, be sure to contact me for my approval of the text. You will meet individually with me in Week 4 to discuss your selection.

Shirley Achor, *Mexican-Americans in a Dallas Barrio*

Elija Anderson, *A Place on the Corner*

Phillipe Bourgeois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*

Elijah and Scott Cummings, *Left Behind in Rosedale: Race Relations and the Collapse of Community Institutions*

Kathryn Dudley, *Debt and Dispossession: Farm Loss in America's Heartland*

Kathryn Dudley, *End of the Line: Lost Jobs, New Lives in Postindustrial*

Mitchell Duneier, *Sidewalk*

Mitchell Duneier, *Slim's Table: Race, Respectability, and Masculinity*

Douglas Frantz and Catherine Collins, *Celebration, U.S.A.: Living in Disney's Brave New Town*

Frida Kerner Furman, *Facing the Mirror: Older Women and Beauty Shop Culture*

Steven Gaines, *Philistines at the Hedgerow: Passion and Property in the Hamptons*

Herbert Gans, *Levittowners: Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community*

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*

Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*

Steven Gregory, *Black Corona: Race and the Politics of Place in an Urban Community*

Madhulika Khandelwal, *Becoming American, Being Indian: An Immigrant Community in NYC*

Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community*

Alex Kotlowitz, *There Are No Children Here*

Jonathon Kozol, *Amazing Grace: The Lives of Children and the Conscience of A Nation*

Elliot Liebow, *Tally's Corner*

Kenneth Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years*

Robert and Helen Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture*

Sarah Mahler, *American Dreaming: Immigrant Life on the Margins*

Fran Markowitz, *A Community in Spite of Itself: Soviet Jewish Emigres in New York*

Joan Moore, *Going Down to the Barrio: Homeboys and Homegirls in Change*

Katherine Newman, *No Shame in My Game: The Working Poor in the Inner City*

John Nichols, *Milagro Beanfield War*

Andrew Ross, *The Celebration Chronicles: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Property Value in Disney's New Town*

John Sanford, *The People from Heaven*

Sarah Schulman, *Rat Bohemia*

Carol Stack, *All Our Kin*

W. Lloyd Warner, *Yankee City*

William Whyte, *Street Corner Society*