

## **American Regional Cultures and Global Transition: Appalachia, Louisiana, and the Texas Border Country**

English 597.02  
Winter 2011 24905  
Denney 238

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TR 1:30-3:18

This course will introduce you to the folklore of three American regions. Each is famous for its traditional culture, but each is often thought of as deviating in a distinctive way from the national culture: Louisiana is “creole,” Texas is “border,” and Appalachia is “folk.” While exploring these differences, we’ll also explore the commonalities. Imagined as different from a supposed American norm, each region is both attractive to outsiders and stigmatized by them. In each region, a dynamic vernacular culture has emerged out of complex race and class relations. In each region, both government policy and economic forces have powerfully transformed local lifeways and the physical environment, and vernacular political expression has been subject to violent repression. Each region has also been strongly marked by in- and out-migration. And each region is strongly connected with the outside world: Louisiana looks to the Francophone world and the African diaspora, Texas maintains strong relationships across the border, and, unexpectedly, Appalachia has been economically and culturally involved with places like Spain and China since the eighteenth century.

We’ll look at historical change through the prism of celebrated folklore forms such as Louisiana Mardi Gras, Appalachian fairy tales, and the Tex-Mex corrido. We’ll also explore the impact—economic, environmental, demographic, and thus also cultural—of recent events: Hurricane Katrina and the reconstruction of the Gulf Coast, mountaintop-removal mining in Kentucky, West Virginia, and Tennessee, and the debates over various kinds of traffic (migrants, drugs, and capital) across the US-Mexican border.

### *GEC CAPSTONE REQUIREMENT*

*This course satisfies the Senior Capstone GEC requirement, “Issues of the Contemporary World.” The Expected Learning Outcomes prescribed are as follows:*

- 1. Students synthesize and apply knowledge from diverse disciplines to contemporary issues.*
- 2. Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationships between information derived from different disciplines by interacting with students from different majors.*
- 3. Students write about or conduct research on the contemporary world*

*As is typical of folklore courses, students in English 597.02 are likely to come from a wide range of majors in the humanities, social and behavioral sciences, arts, and beyond. We don’t expect you to have a background in folklore studies: instead, we hope*

*you'll contribute what you know from your major towards the group's understanding of these regions. This course fulfills the capstone requirement by asking you to synthesize both primary sources and scholarship from different disciplines—folklore, history, literary studies, ethnomusicology, anthropology, and others—in order to address issues of general importance in the contemporary world:*

- *How do local traditions interact with national and global frameworks?*
- *How can we examine cultures comparatively, when cultures are experienced as unique and distinctive?*
- *How do Americans and American policymakers think about regional cultures? How is this thinking affected by politics and economics?*

### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

You're expected to bring the readings with you to class, except of course in the case of websites.

#### Books ordered

Lindahl, Carl, Maida Owens, and C. Renee Harvison (Eds.). *Swapping Stories: Folktales from Louisiana*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997.

Abrahams, Roger D., Nick Spitzer, John F. Szwed and Robert Farris Thompson. *Blues for New Orleans: Mardi Gras and America's Creole Soul*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.

Roberts, Leonard W. *Up Cutshin and Down Greasy: Folkways of a Kentucky Mountain Family*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1959.

Paredes, Américo. *"With His Pistol In His Hand": A Border Ballad and Its Hero*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1958.

#### Other readings

Links are provided for readings directly available on the Web. Others, marked "Carmen," are in fact in Carmen. Those marked "Library" can be found online through the library catalogue by searching the journal title. (Note that journals are sometimes in multiple repositories depending on the article's publication year.) The readings come from a wide range of sources and some may seem opaque. Don't panic. We will talk them through. When words and references are unfamiliar, try looking them up!

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

All assignments must be completed as described below for a passing grade.

1. Participation. You should be present, on time, prepared, and awake. You should have relevant contributions to make in discussion and respond respectfully to other speakers. If you are shy about talking in class you can add to the post-class discussion (see below, #3). 15%.

2. Three take-home exams, one for each region, asking you to synthesize readings and class discussion in relation to major regional issues and cultural forms. Ca. 1200 well-chosen words, a bit longer for the last one. 20%, 20%, and 25%.

3. Two post-class writings, posted on Carmen under Discussions. Ca. 600 words each. You'll post a brief list of the issues or concepts that seemed most important from the day's discussion, 3 or 4 items, each with some explanation and commentary (you can develop, challenge, revise, question as you see fit). These will help everyone to study for the exams and to retain what they've learned. Others are welcome to add additional comment—this will count as extra credit for your participation grade. I will choose five “scribes” at the end of each class session by pulling names out of a bag, each of you at random until your two dates are up. This means that you could be chosen at any time so you should be taking good notes every day! (A substitute for pop quizzes.) To receive credit you *must post* by midnight of the day after the class in question (e.g. Tuesday class-post by midnight Weds). 10% each.

### **Grading scale:**

F. You and/or your assignments failed to materialize at the necessary minimum; written work was not done, not relevant to the assignment, or not your own.

D. You've done just enough work to slide through: done some reading, turned in all major assignments with minimal attention to their requirements, and been present in body and occasionally in soul.

C. You've done the course reading and turned in all required work on time and in the spirit of the assignment. You've been present in both body and mind as a useful participant in the class. Your course assignments were of limited value, perhaps because of major problems with mechanics, organization, or logic in your writing, or perhaps because you have not thought very deeply about the material.

B. You've done everything required for a C, but have responded more fully to the demands of the course, both in class and in your writing. Your written work demonstrates your engagement with both the readings and class discussion. You've made progress in reading challenging material, drawing connections between different cultural forms and situations, and shaping your thinking through writing.

A. You've done everything required for a B. In addition, you've read actively, thought creatively, and written with style. I've learned something from you.

**Attendance** affects your grade both directly (via your participation grade) and indirectly (via your ability to do the written work effectively). Announcements made at the beginning of class will not be repeated for latecomers, so it is also in your interest to arrive on time. If you must miss a class, you should arrange to get the notes from a fellow student. You *may not make up work missed due to absence* except in documented cases of illness, etc. As per department policy, five absences automatically result in a final grade of F. I am not, however, unreasonable. If something dramatic is going on, please speak with me so we can negotiate a plan.

**Office hours.** T 3:30-5, W 1-3 at the **Mershon Center**, 104A, 1501 Neil Ave. (corner of 8<sup>th</sup> and Neil), 292-8683. Or by appointment or by telephone. Please note that I am affiliated with multiple units on campus and have a manic meeting schedule. Therefore it is always best to try me first by email rather than phone, and even during regular office hours I need to know when you're coming so I don't double-book. Nonetheless I am always happy to make time for you!

**Class Cancellation.** In the unlikely event of class cancellation due to emergency, I will contact you via email and request that a note on department letterhead be placed on the door. In addition, I will contact you as soon as possible following the cancellation to let you know what will be expected of you for our next class meeting.

**Plagiarism.** Plagiarism is the representation of another's works or ideas as one's own: it includes the unacknowledged word for word use and/or paraphrasing of another person's work, and/or the inappropriate unacknowledged use of another person's ideas. In accordance with university rules, all cases of suspected plagiarism will be reported to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. Be careful to credit your sources appropriately, especially when doing research on the Internet (come to me if you are not certain how to do this). And bear in mind that it is far less work to write the exam yourself than to plagiarize convincingly.

**Disability resources.** Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated, and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office for Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue; telephone 292-3307, TDD 292-0901; <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/>.

## SCHEDULE

Background and/or discussion questions for each session will be posted on Carmen.

### Introduction.

**1/4** What is a regional culture? What is national culture? How can we compare cultures?

### I. Louisiana: A Creole Culture

**1/6** Introduction to Louisiana history. Images of French Louisiana.

**Read** *Swapping Stories*, xxv-xlvi, 3-26

**Film** *Louisiana Story*, dir. Robert Flaherty 1948 (77 mins.)

**1/11** Creolization, language, and narrative

**Film** "Swapping Stories: Folktales from Louisiana," dir. Patrick Mire. 1998.

**Read** *Swapping Stories*, Part I: Individual Storytellers.

**1/13** Stigma and revival in Cajun country: food and music

**Film** "J'ai été au bal: The Cajun and Zydeco Music of Louisiana," dir. Les Blank and Chris Strachwitz. 1989.

**Read** Mark Mattern, *Acting in Concert: Music, Community, and Political Action*, pp.79-117. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998. Carmen

Gutierrez, G. Paige. "The Social and Symbolic Uses of Ethnic/Regional Foodways: Cajuns and Crawfish in South Louisiana." In *Mardi Gras, Gumbo, and Zydeco: Readings in Louisiana Culture*. 134-149. Ed. Marcia Gaudet and James C. McDonald. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003. Carmen

**1/18** Rural tension and reciprocity: Cajun Mardi Gras

**Film** "Dance for a Chicken," dir. Patrick Mire, 1993.

**Read** Lindahl, Carl. "The Presence of the Past in Cajun Mardi Gras." *Journal of Folklore Research* 33 (1996):125-153. Library

**1/20** Race and class in New Orleans Mardi Gras

**Film** "The New Orleans Black Indians: A Study of Arts," *Faces of Culture*, #23, PBS. 1983.

**Read** *Blues for New Orleans*

**1/25** After Katrina

**Read** Lindahl, Carl. "Katrina Stories, The David Effect, and The Right to Be Wrong." *Journal of American Folklore* forthcoming. Carmen.

*Surviving Katrina and Rita in Houston: A Survivor-Centered Storytelling and Documentation Project* <http://www.katrinaandrita.org/index.html> (explore this website)

Takehome exam 1 distributed

## **II. Texas: A Border Culture**

**1/27** Border society

**Film** "Chulas Fronteras (the Beautiful Border)," dir. Les Blank, 1976

**Read** Paredes, Américo. "*With His Pistol In His Hand*," chs. 1-2.

**1/31** Takehome exam #1 due in Carmen dropbox by noon.

**2/1** Border society and song construction

**Read** Paredes continued—finish chs. 3 and 4.

**2/3** Mutations of the corrido: migration and narco-trafficking

**Film** "Al Otro Lado (To the Other Side)," dir. Natalia Almada, 1996.  
See related website <http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2006/alotrolado/>

**Read** Herrera-Sobek, María. "*Corridos and Canciones of Mica, Migra, and Coyotes: A Commentary on Undocumented Immigration.*" In Stephen Stern and John Allan Cicala, eds. *Creative Ethnicity*, 87-104. Logan: Utah State University Press. 1991.  
Carmen

Randal Archibold. "Far From Home, Mexicans Sing Age-Old Ballads of a New Life," *New York Times*, July 6, 2007,  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/06/us/06corrido.html>

Downes, Lawrence. "The Ballad of Joe Arpaio," *New York Times*, March 15, 2009,  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/16/opinion/16mon4.html>

and maybe an update on Joe Arpaio and the new Arizona law--

**2/10** Conflicts of memory

**Film** First half of "Lonestar," dir. John Sayles, 1996

**Read** Flores, Richard, "The Alamo: Myth, Public History, and the Politics of Inclusion," in: *Radical History Review* 77 (2000), pp. 91-103. Library

**2/8** Immigration and generations

**Film** Second half of "Lonestar."

**Read** Reyna, José R. and María Herrera-Sobek. "Jokelore, Cultural Differences, and Linguistic Dexterity: The Construction of the Mexican Immigrant in Chicano Humor" In David R. Maciel and Maria Herrera-Sobek, eds. *Culture Across Borders: Mexican Immigration & Popular Culture*, 203-226. Tucson: University of Arizona Press. 1998. Carmen.

**2/15** Chicanismo. Social movements and identity construction

Limón, José E. "The Folk Performance of 'Chicano' and the Cultural Limits of Political Ideology." In Richard Bauman and Roger D. Abrahams, eds. *And Other Neighborly Names": Social Process and Cultural Image in Texas Folklore*, 197-225. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. Carmen.

Latorre, Guisela. 2010. *Walls of Empowerment: Chicana/o Indigenist Murals of California*, ch. 2. Austin: University of Texas Press. Carmen.

see also <http://www.sparcmurals.org:16080/sparcone/>

### **III. Appalachia: A Mountain Culture**

**2/17** Introduction to Appalachia: Representing the Region

**Film** *Appalachian Journey* (Alan Lomax, dir. Association for Cultural Equity, 1991.)

(streaming at <http://www.folkstreams.net/film,128> with transcript and supporting materials)

**Read** Roberts, *Up Cutshin and Down Greasy*.

Arnow, Harriette Simpson. "The Goat Who Was a Cow." In *The Collected Short Stories of Harriette Simpson Arnow*, 19-30. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2005 (originally written ca. 1924)

**2/21** Takehome exam #2 due in Carmen dropbox by noon.

**2/22** Fairy tales and family relations: ogres, witchy women and fighting men

**Read** Sobol, Joseph Daniel. "Jack in the Raw: Ray Hicks." In *Jack in Two Worlds*, 3-26. Ed. William Bernard McCarthy. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. Carmen

Lindahl, Carl. "Two Versions of "Rawhead and Bloodybones" from the Farmer-Muncy Family." *Journal of Folklore Research* 38(2001, 1/2): 55-57. Library

"Rawhead and Bloodybones" as told by Glen Muncy Anderson, May 4, 1997. *Journal of Folklore Research* 38(2001, 1/2): 57-60. Library

"Rawhead and Bloodybones" as told by Jane Muncy Fugate, June 3, 2000. *Journal of Folklore Research* 38(2001, 1/2): 60-67. Library

Lindahl, Carl. "The Uses of Terror: Appalachian *Märchen*-Telling, Folklore Methodology, and Narrator's Truth." *Fabula* 47 (2006): 1-13. Carmen

**2/24** Music and migration

**Read** Abrahams, Roger D. "Moving in America," *Prospects* 3 (1977): 63 - 82. Carmen

Rosenberg, Neil. "Bluegrass." In *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, eds. Charles Wilson and William Ferris, 993-994. Chapel Hill: UNC Press. Carmen

Cantwell, Robert. *Bluegrass Breakdown: The Making of the Old Southern Sound*, ch.3. 60-90. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. 2d ed., 2003. Carmen

**3/1** Labor and struggle in mining communities

**Read** Portelli, Alessandro. "No Neutrals There: The Cultural Class Struggle in the Harlan Miners' Strike of 1931-32." In *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories*, 216-240. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991. Carmen



Hardy, Charles and Alessandro Portelli. "I Can Almost See the Lights of Home ~ A Field Trip to Harlan County, Kentucky. An Essay in Sound." *Journal for MultiMedia History* 2, 1999

<http://www.albany.edu/jmmh/vol2no1/lightssoundessay.html>

(browse)

**3/3** Are we America?

**Film** Excerpt from "Deliverance," dir. John Boorman. 1972.

Krenn, Michael L. 2010. "Domestic Politics and Public Diplomacy: Appalachian Cultural Exhibits and the Changing Nature of U.S. Public Diplomacy, 1964-1972." In Kenneth A. Osgood and Brian C. Etheredge, eds. *The United States and Public Diplomacy: New Directions in Cultural and International History*, 315-343. Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff.

Portelli, Alessandro. "It was Supposed to Be Happening in Berkeley: The 1960s Meet Eastern Kentucky." In *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue*, 199-231. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997. Carmen

**3/8** Moving mountains

**Read** Hufford, Mary. "Reclaiming the Commons: Narratives of Progress, Preservation, and Ginseng." In *Culture, Environment, and Conservation in the Appalachian South*, ed. Benita J. Howell. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003. Carmen

(For pictures and details see Hufford, Mary. "Tending the Commons: Folklife and Landscape in Southern West Virginia." American Folklife Center, Library of Congress. 2000. <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/cmnshtml/cmnshtml.html> )

**3/10** Wrap-up

Takehome exam #3 distributed.

**3/15** Takehome exam due in Carmen dropbox