Course Description

This seminar examines rural American life using a cultural lens. Drawing from the interdisciplinary field of rural studies, this course investigates the cultural meanings of community, isolation, inclusion and exclusion in rural America. What is the meaning of rural culture? How are symbolic boundaries drawn, reinforced, or dissolved in response to identities and practices in rural places? We will answer these questions through focusing on the following topics: rural “others,” rural race relations, queers in the countryside, urban readings of the rural, food and environmentalism, “rural chic” trends, and deconstructing “white trash.” This course is open to non-sociology majors, but a firm grasp of the social sciences is required.

Course Objectives

At the end of the semester you will have developed the following skills and abilities: 1) To think critically about the impact of place on identity and social relations; 2) To become familiar with a wide range of theories that explain social relations in rural places, and to apply these theories to various contexts; 3) To successfully complete a multi-stage research project on a topic of your choice within rural sociology.

Course Requirements

Attendance Coming to class is mandatory. Each student is allowed to miss 1 day of class and I will not ask questions about the nature of the absence. This absence is meant to cover illnesses and unforeseen events. Each absence after 1 day results in the removal of points from your total grade. Lateness is strongly discouraged. After 2 late passes, points will be deducted from your total grade. If you will arrive more than 15 minutes late, please do not come to class.

**I have a no phone policy in my class. Make sure your phone is turned off when you enter class. Except during breaks, please do not engage with your phone in any manner. If this policy is violated, I will ask you to leave for the class period. You may use your laptop in class, provided that it is not used for email, Facebook, etc.**

Participation You will be graded on your effort to verbally engage with the topic of discussion. Of course, to be able to fully engage with the topic, you must read all of the assigned material before coming to class each day. **Whether hard copy or electronic, please bring the assigned readings for the day and your notes to class.** I encourage you to share your viewpoint during class discussions, even, and especially, if it contradicts that of others. Disagreement and class
debates can be quite fruitful and thought-provoking. During our class discussions, please show respect to me and other students who may have different perspectives from your own. Part of being respectful is to keep your verbal contributions to a reasonable length, and not to dominate the discussion.

**Discussion Leader:** Each of you will be responsible for leading discussion for the duration of one class. You will bring thought-provoking questions to class and supplement these questions by drawing on posts on Blackboard for that week’s readings. Come up with questions that center especially on the theory advanced, methods, and themes in the data presented by the author(s). Your job is to facilitate the discussion and keep us from drifting too far off topic. Always circle back to the course’s overall project and guiding questions.

**Weekly Memos:** For 10 weeks you will write a memo, due **each Monday at 7:00pm** (24 hours before class). Each memo will be approximately **300 words** and will pose questions or thought-provoking comments on the reading assigned for that week. The best memos will draw upon the theoretical approach of each piece or make connections to previous readings. Post your weekly memo on Blackboard. These will be graded as: check +, check, or check – (2 points; 1.7; 1.5). Note: The Discussion Leader of the week is exempt from posting a memo.

**Rural Art Analysis:** Worth 30 points. Each paper should be a minimum of 6 full pages (8 max.), double-spaced, Times New Roman or Calibri font. Further instructions will be posted on Blackboard.

**Final Paper** You will write one long research paper at the end of the course. In your paper you will use the theories we discuss in class to analyze a particular rural sociology topic of your choice. This paper will be 12 to 15 pages in length.

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<td>Weekly Memos</td>
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**Required Texts**  Please purchase the following text books for this course. You can find them at the Oberlin campus bookstore. These books will also be available on reserve at Mudd Library. All other required readings will be available on Blackboard.

**Students with Disabilities** Please let me know if you need disability-related accommodations in this course. Contact the Student Academic Services to develop a plan for assistance: Jane Boomer, Coordinator of Disability Services, Room G27 Peters Hall, ext. 55588.

**Academic Honesty** This course adheres to the policies of the Oberlin College Honor Code and Honor System. Please add the statement “I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment” to the bottom of the last page on all written work. For more information on the Honor Code, see: [http://www.oberlin.edu/students/student_pages/honor_code.html](http://www.oberlin.edu/students/student_pages/honor_code.html).

**Religious Observance** Please inform me by the end of Week 2 of the semester if you need to miss a class to observe a religious holiday. We will find a way for you to make up the work.

**Course Schedule**

**Week 1: (2/4)—Overview**

T: Introduction to the Course

**Week 2: (2/11)— Meanings of Nature & Country Life, Part 1**

T: Bell, Michael M. *Childerley: Nature and Morality in a Country Village*, pp.3-119

**Week 3: (2/18)— Meanings of Nature & Country Life, Part 2**

T: Bell, Michael M. *Childerley: Nature and Morality in a Country Village*, pp.119-241

**Week 4: (2/25)—“Hillbillies,” Poverty & Oral History, Part 1**

**DUE: Rural Art Analysis, Feb. 25, Hard copy in class, electronic on Blackboard**

T: Portelli, Alessandro. 2011. *They Say in Harlan County*, pp.3-182
**Week 5: (3/4)—“Hillbillies,” Poverty & Oral History, Part 2**


**Week 6: (3/11)—Rural Folk Traditions & Gender**


**Week 7: (3/18)—Queers in the Countryside**


---Spring Break—(3/22-3/30)—Please begin reading the Marrow text, and work on outline.

**Week 8: (4/1)—Rural America & Immigration, Part 1**

**DUE: Outline, April 1, Hard copy in class, electronic on Blackboard**

*T:* Marrow, Helen. *New Destination Dreaming*, pp.1-141

**Week 9: (4/8)—Rural America & Immigration, Part 2**

*T:* Marrow, Helen. *New Destination Dreaming*, pp.142-266

**Week 10: (4/15)—Environmentalism, Neoliberal Projects &“Country Chic”**

  *(In class analysis of “rural chic” material)*

**Week 11: (4/22)—Food, Race & Social Justice**

**DUE: 1st Draft of Final Paper, April 22, 2 Hard copies in class, electronic on Blackboard**

*T:* Alkon, Alison. *Black, White, and Green* (entire book)
**Week 12: (4/29)—“Rez Life” & Rurality**


**Week 13: (5/6)—Class Presentations**

**DUE: Final Paper, May 13th, 7:00pm on Blackboard**

T: Attendance is mandatory. No readings assigned.

*Note: Some details of this syllabus may change over the course of the semester.*