13F ANTH 3155-001 (CGAS) Prof. Frederick H Damon

10285 206 Brooks Hall

MWF 10:00AM - 10:50AM Maury Hall 104 924-6826//fhd@virginia.edu

Scheduled Final Exam: Saturday, December 14, 2013 9-12n OH: M&F: 11-13 & by appointment

**Introduction to Transforming Everyday Life in America**

Anthropology 3155–Fall 2013

COURSE ABSTRACT: Taking a production and exchange orientation to society, this course uses anthropological models to analyze aspects of the US experience in North America and its extension into the world. The models will be drawn primarily from the anthropological analysis of exchange, rites of transition, sacrifice and mythology. Although introduced by issues drawn from the immediate conditions of American culture, the course has a serious historical orientation. It concludes with an analysis of the most recent of our periodic, if not cyclical, crises.

For this course you have to read 7 or 8 books—you have choices amongst a total of 14—watch two movies, and write 6 papers, 5 between 2 and 4 pages in length, a sixth and final no more than 10 pages. The paper on movies must be written with one or more other students in the class. There will be no tests but spot quizzes. The course should satisfy the 2nd Writing Requirement. Mondays and Wednesdays will be mostly lectures, though discussion will not be discouraged; Fridays the emphasis switches.

Books to be Purchased or found on Reserve

The Last Cowboy (Reserve only) **F391.4 .B58 K7 1990**

**Capital, Volume I by Karl Marx (Reserve, though copies may be available at many good bookstores)**

Fastfood Nation by Erik Schlosser;

And they all Sang Hallelujah by D. D. Bruce,

and

A Shopkeepers Millennium by P. Johnson,

**Or**

Rockdale (2nd ed.) Wallace, Anthony;

The New, New Thing, by Michael Lewis,

**& 1 of 3**

A River Lost: The Life and Death of the Columbia by Blaine Harden,

**Or**

The Price of Justice (2013) by Laurence Leamer

**Or**,

The Worst Hard Time**,** by Timothy Egan;

Act of Congress (2013) by Robert Kaiser

**Or**

Bomb Power: The Modern Presidency and the National Security State by Garry Wills;

**2 OF 3**: Liar's Poker and The Big Short , by Michael Lewis; MAKING PCR A Story of Biotechnology by Paul Rabinow

I. INTRODUCTION

8/28

 Course Structure, Content and Expectations

II. IN THE BEGINNING: Production and Consumption from North America

 8/30-

The Last Cowboy by Jane Kramer[[1]](#footnote-1)

Fastfood Nation by Erik Schlosser

Capital Parts I&II (Chapters 1-3&4-6) [[2]](#footnote-2) (on reserve only) by Karl Marx should be read while reading Kramer and Schlosser

**FIRST PAPER, 2-4PP DUE 9/16, 5pm**

 III. TRANSFORMATIONS/FOUNDATIONS or *VICEVERSA*

—*On “God’s Design for Man’s Progress”*

*A. 19th Century Foundations of the Modern World 9/13-9/30*

And they all Sang Hallelujah by D. D. Bruce,

A Shopkeepers Millennium by P. Johnson,

or

Rockdale (2nd ed.) Wallace, Anthony (Strongly encouraged for 4th year anthro majors, mature American Studies types and others—a great book but for the maturing.)[[3]](#footnote-3)

**SECOND PAPER, 2-4pp. DUE 10/2, 5pm**

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| INTERLUDE: A STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND“America Under the Gun,” Chapter 24 and “The Making of a Giant,” Chapter 25 in The Eternal Frontier by Tim Flannery (Toolkit) |

 *B. 20TH CENTURY REALIZATIONS IN THE MODERN WORLD—considering the environment and technology in the placing of power.[[4]](#footnote-4)* **9/30-10/21**

 1 of 3

 The Worst Hard Time**,** by Timothy Egan;

Or A River Lost: The Life and Death of the Columbia by Blaine Harden

Or The Price of Justice by Laurence Leamer

&

 The New, New Thing, by Michael Lewis,

|  |
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| **NOTE BENE:** Saturday, October 12 - Tuesday, October 15—*the* ***reading*** *period* |

**THIRD PAPER, 2-4pp. DUE October 21**

IV. UNDERSTANDING (and acting upon that…) U.S. RITUAL AND MYTHOLOGY

 A. *Politics…“designed…to disguise dirt”?\** **10/-11/8**

"The Political Category and the State from the Thirteenth Century Onward" by Louis Dumont (Toolkit as "Dumont Genesis 1 & 2")

 "What Good Are Elections..." by fhdamon (Toolkit)…

 &

 Act of Congress (2013) by Robert Kaiser

Or

 Bomb Power: The Modern Presidency and the National Security State by Garry Wills

**FOURTH PAPER, 2-4pp. DUE 11/8**

 B. Movies as Myths **11-18-11/25**

1) Read “George Bancroft: Nature and the Fulfillment of the Covenant,” from Historians Against History by David Noble (Toolkit).

Chapter 8, “Time Regained,” from The Savage Mind by C. Lévi-Strauss (Toolkit)

 “The Structural Study of Myth” by Lévi-Strauss (Toolkit)

2) View 2 of the following 9 movies one of which must be:

 i) Paul Greengrass’s *United 93* (2006) or ii) Oliver Stone’s *World Trade Towers* (2006); the other should be chosen from; iii) John Ford’s *The Searchers* (1956); iv) John Boorman’s (or James Dickey’s) *Deliverance* (1972); v) Clint Eastwood’s *Unforgiven* (1992); vi) Bruce Evans’ *Mr. Brooks* (2007); vii) *The Green Zone (2010);* or viii) J. C. Chandor’s *Margin Call* (2011).

**FIFTH PAPER, written by 2 to X people, 4-X2 pp. DUE 11/25**

 V. A SYNTHESIS AND ITS CONTRADICTIONS—Housing, Paradigmatic Substitution and Finance Capital[[5]](#footnote-5)

**11/25-12/6**

 *A. The synthesis…the work of Constance Perin*

“The Ladder of Life,” Chapter 2 and “Many Wagons, Many Stars: The Uses of Land, Zoning, and Houses,” Chapter 4 by Constance Perin in Everything in Its Place (Course Resources)

 *B. … about the contradictions*

READ TWO OF THREE: Liar's Poker(1989)[[6]](#footnote-6) by Michael Lewis; MAKING PCR A Story of Biotechnology(1993)by Paul Rabinow or The Big Short(2010) by Michael Lewis;

**FINAL PAPER: USING THE MODELS AND IDEAS PRESENTED THROUGHOUT THIS COURSE CONSTRUCT AN ANALYTICAL SYNTHESIS OF THE SOCIAL SYSTEM DESCRIBED BY THE WORK OF PERIN, maybe RABINOW, LEWIS, AND A LIMITED NUMBER OF OUTSIDE SOURCES (OTHER BOOKS, COURSES, NEWSPAPERS, MOVIES—I.E. THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF CONTEMPORARY US SOCIETY AND CULTURE). ONE POSSIBLE AVENUE FOR THIS FINAL PAPER MIGHT BE TO RETURN TO PART III’S A AND COMPARE AND CONTRAST WHAT YOU STUDIED THERE WITH THIS--Going Clear: Scientology, Hollywood, and the Prison of Belief**** **(2013) BY LAWRENCE WRIGHT (KNOPF).**

 **DUE ON Saturday, December 14, 2013 9-12n**

**(The day the final is scheduled for this course—there will be no final exam).**

 **COURSE NOTES AND REQUIREMENTS**

1. This course is taught through its readings, lectures (& “quizzes”), its ethnographic response papers and your research projects, observed reactions to lectures and class participation, especially on Fridays. *Attendance is mandatory and I reserve the right to drop people from the class or deduct 20% from final grades for poor class attendance or participation.* My graduate students, all of whom are on Facebook, tell me to insist that you do not have an open computer running during the course. If you need a computer to take notes please seek written permission for that from me.

2. Grades will be calculated in the following way

(Spot) Quizzes (largely for formalizing attendance and helping you consider the day’s presentation): up to 20%

Class Attendance and Participation: up to 30%

The Four Thematic Response Papers and one jointly written paper on movies(10-20 pages total): 30%

The Final Research Plan (10+/\_pages): 20%

3. The Final Research Plan/Paper (Joint projects are permissible).

 The social crisis that started more or less in the US sometime between late 2007 and 2008 now looks to be one of the more severe periods in our economic history; their remains a sense or fear that as that we are heading into a second slump invoking images of the 1930s, and especially the circumstances of 1937-38; government spending occasioned by the beginning of WWII ended that episode. What happened in ‘housing’ was arguably not the only important dynamic behind the beginnings of these times. Yet it was at least pivotal. Michael Lewis remains one of the more acute ethnographic journalists of our times, and it will behoove all of you to leave the course having read his work through the lens we are creating. Transparently Rabinow’s MAKING PCR is a very different book. Yet it involves definitional, transformational processes that resemble those Lewis describes in Liar’s Poker. Considering the two together, or Making PCR and The Big Short, might be a crucial test of your anthropological sensitivities—seeing similar patterns through very diverse social activities. Your final paper, therefore, should amount to a good sympathetic discussion of two of these books viewed through the perspectives of the course’s major themes. This reading is sufficiently dense that there should be no reason to go outside the course’s syllabus for your concluding paper. However, anyone who wishes to do so and or draw in materials from elsewhere should feel welcome to do so especially if you discuss it with Damon and/or Garcia.

4. Many issues pertaining to an understanding of American culture are addressed daily in major newspapers, especially during major election periods, the election for governor in Virginia perhaps providing one for us this fall. You are strongly advised to read, every day, *The Washington Post,* *The N.Y. Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal* and other local newspapers of your choice.

**Since this course started in the late 1970s it has been a great teaching and learning opportunity for me and hundreds of undergraduates. I look forward to continuing that tradition this year with you.**

1. See http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/20/us/high-plains-aquifer-dwindles-hurting-farmers.html?hp&\_r=0. And http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/07/us/irrigation-subsidies-leading-to-more-water-use.html?src=recg [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “What I want to praise here is the recognition that the unit of a social system corresponds to the predominance in it of certain institutions which it is the duty of the sociologist to determine, not only as present by the side of others but as giving its character to the social whole. In Marx's own words:

Under all forms of society there is a certain production which by itself and by its conditions determines the rank and influence of all the rest. It is the general light in which all the other colours are dipped and which modifies them in their particularity. It is a special ether which determines the specific c weight of everything that appears in it (P. 27; cf trans., pp.40-41).

The aesthetic feeling is not so frequent in Marx. It marks here an intense perception of the specificity of each type of society and of its unity. We may call it a holistic and hierarchical perception." (Dumont, Louis 1977 Chapter 8 "The Encounter with Political Economy and Its Reform" From Mandeville to Marx. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press. P162.). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Bruce and Johnson books are also extremely good, but they are shorter and works by scholars in their youth. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. There are, or were, bright spots: See <http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/08/12/farewell-to-a-recovering-plunderer/> and read the hyperlinks.

\* Kaiser, p. 343 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “I’d like the genuine elites to explain why (*sic*) they did, why they behaved in the way they did. Because I think in the end, if you’re going to get back to a saner relationship between our financial system and the rest of the economy and the rest of the society, you have to have people at the very top of that structure who have some sense of social obligation. And they don’t right now.

…And it leaves half the smartest kids from the best schools wanting to be, more than anything else in their lives, bond traders or investment bankers. It’s a waste of talent. The wrong economic signals are being sent by the system that’s in place. I think if the rules were changed in some obvious ways, the returns to the finance sector would decline and talent would find more useful avenues of endeavor.” Michael Lewis, Bloomberg.com interview: http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=aUpBrUJ.pIiA [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “A lot of Solly people were angry with Lewis when he wrote Liar's Poker-a tattle tale. My sentence about barking at the clerk is meant to reflect my own emotions at the time. There's hyperbole in the book-things are elevated to heighten the humor and satire- but it's essentially truthful. Keep teaching it.”

**From:** F. H. Damon <fhd@virginia.edu>
**To:** tbernard77@yahoo.com
**Sent:** Sunday, September 13, 2009 9:36:26 AM
**Subject:** On Liar's Poker

I read your piece in today's WPost Outlook section. And enjoyed it. Good luck with your novel-- I think Ron Chernow was correct in The House of Morgan to write that we need to know much more about our country's financial history: our most current experience clearly reprises many others, 1907 in particular.
But to my question: I have been teaching a course of US culture for 30 years and started putting Liar's Poker in it from the day it appeared. Its a coming of age book, and a good one for undergraduates to read; Lewis's essay last November/December brought that home. But you say its fiction. Please tell me how so I can warn my students.
  Again, good luck with your novel: The LongTerm case gave me some good paragraphs for several years in the slot where Liar's Poker still rests, in a section dealing with the place of debt structures in our society which exposes students to mortgages...
fhdamon

-- Professor Frederick H. Damon [↑](#footnote-ref-6)