

INTRODUCTION TO APPALACHIAN STUDIES

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**Course Description.**

This course is a multidisciplinary introduction to Appalachian culture, history, and society. It will examine how and why the central and southern Appalachian Mountains came to be viewed as a distinct region, "Appalachia," and it will examine Appalachia's place in American life. We will encounter the region's rich traditions of music and literature; its rural social life including kinship and neighborhood institutions; coal mining history, community patterns, labor struggles; the experience of women and African Americans in Appalachia; community politics and grassroots struggles; and current environmental issues including mountaintop removal coal mining. The course will begin by looking at two social issues in Appalachia, mountaintop removal mining and poverty, and it will then examine historical and contemporary factors that have brought both about.

Particular attention will be devoted to representations and images of Appalachia. We will compare alternative ways in which Appalachia has been pictured in fiction, Hollywood films, documentaries, music, plays, academic histories, and social science literature. The reading assignments will focus on contemporary works of fiction, history, and social scientists. The course is being offered on a one day per week schedule in order to permit extensive film viewing and discussion.

The following books are required for this course:

- 1) Erik Reece, *Lost Mountain: A Year in the Vanishing Wilderness*.
- 2) Altina Waller, *Feud: Hatfields, McCoys, and Social Change in Appalachia, 1860-1900*.
- 3) Denise Giardina, *Storming Heaven*.
- 4) Denise Giardina, *The Unquiet Earth*.
- 5) A few additional readings may be placed on electronic reserve. If so, I will give you information on how to access them once they become available.

**Course Requirements.**

All assignments must be typed and turned in as hard copies only. **I cannot accept electronic copies!** Also, please keep a file copy for yourself.

I. Film Reviews (15% of course).

Since viewing films is an important component of this course, I will ask you to provide short (one page) written analyses of **each** of the films we view as part of your written work. In your reviews, please summarize briefly the content of the film and critically evaluate its accomplishments including

especially its representations of Appalachia. In doing so, for instance, you may wish to comment upon the film's impact on you; its artistic quality or its historical accuracy; its connection to other films, reading assignments, and class discussions on the same topic; its biases (what it presents and doesn't show) and points of view; and, in general, its contribution to the understanding or misunderstanding of Appalachia. I will collect these reviews in two parts, the first set will be due on Oct. 13; the second will be due on December 8. **I urge you to write each review during the week you watch the film since, sometimes, our memories of media experience fade fast.**

Rationale Statement: The sociologist Alfred Schutz once described the multiple forms of consciousness that we move into and out of throughout the day. Along with other structural characteristics, each form of consciousness, according to Schutz, has a different degree of wide-awakeness ranging from sleep "dreams," to "fantasy" ("day-dreams") to what Schutz called the "mundane attitude of everyday life" (the state in which we [semi-?] consciously go about most of the time, taking what is happening around us for granted), and finally to the very wide-awake attitude of the "scientific" or "theoretical" consciousness where we question things and experiences that are otherwise unproblematic or taken-for-granted. In our culture, thanks to Hollywood and the television entertainment industry, viewing films has become a rather passive, non-thinking (non-critical!!) activity of relaxation. The goal of asking you to write about the films we watch each week is designed to encourage you to view them in a wide-awake, critical, or theoretical manner and to reflect on them actively. At the same time, films are fun and I have tried to choose films for viewing in this course that not only illustrate important representational tendencies but that are also entertaining. My hope is that this will be both enlightening and enjoyable. (So, when the lights dim, be prepared to write and bring the popcorn!)

### III. Take-Home Exams. (75% of Course Grade.)

Three take-home, essay examinations will ask you to integrate reading assignments, film viewings, lectures, and class discussions. These exams are "open-book" but you must not discuss or work on them with anyone else. They must represent your own, independent preparation, thinking, and writing!

### IV. In-class Participation. (10% of Course Grade.)

Because this class meets only once a week, and because of its stress on discussion and participation, both regular attendance and active participation are important to the success of our efforts this semester. Consequently, I will give each student a grade for in-class participation at the end of the term. This will represent an assessment of the extent to which each participant attended, was involved in, and contributed to the shared experience of the course, kept up on assignments, and was able to share reactions to discussion topics and film viewings.

The grade for in-class participation is "positive;" that is, it is an assessment of each participant's weekly preparedness and contribution to our common project this semester. Additionally, regular attendance is required. Any unexcused absence may result in a grade penalty; two such "absences" will result in at least a "letter" grade reduction in the final course grade.

Also, please note that all student code items in regard to academic behavior, such as plagiarism, apply to this course. It is each student's responsibility

to understand this code of conduct.

V. Subscribe to Appalink. This is an important on-line source of current information about Appalachia. Here's how to sign-up.xxxx Commenting in class on information you have acquired from Appalink can contribute to the class participation part of your grade and you may find ways to comment on it in your take-home essay exams.

### TOPICAL OUTLINE

- I. Case Studies of Contemporary Appalachian Issues:
  - A. Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining.
  - B. Poverty
  
- II. How Did These Situations Come About?
  - A. The Social Construction of "Appalachia": Ballads, Moonshine, Feuds, and Poverty before Coal Mining.
  - B. The Industrial Transformation of Appalachia.
  - C. Deindustrialization, Contemporary Social Life, and Continuing Struggles.

### Tentative Course Outline

Sept. 8. **Introduction:** Mapping Appalachia

View in class: "Strangers and Kin"

#### **I. Case Studies of Contemporary Appalachian Issues**

##### **A. Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining.**

Sept. 15. MTR (1)

Read Reece, *Lost Mountain*, pp. xxi-108.

View in Class: "Black Diamonds."

Sept. 22. MTR (2)

Read Reece, *Lost Mountain*, pp. 108-235.

View in Class: "Is God Green?"

##### **B. Appalachian Poverty**

Sept. 29. Appalachian Poverty in the 1960s and Today.

Read: Cattell-Gordon, "The Appalachian Inheritance: A Culturally Transmitted Traumatic Stress Syndrome?"

Karen Tice and Dwight Billings, "Appalachian Culture and Resistance."

View in Class: "Appalachia: Rich Land, Poor People"

**\*\*\*\*\* Take-Home Exam 1 Due Today (20% of course grade).**

## II. How Did These Situations Come to Be?

### A. The Social Construction of "Appalachia": Ballads, Moonshine, Feuds, and Poverty before Coal Mining.

Oct. 6. Poverty in Late Nineteenth Century Appalachia: Creating the "Discourse" on Appalachia.

Read: D. Billings & K. Blee, "'Where the Sun Set Crimson and the Moon Rose Red': Writing Appalachia and the KY Mountain Feuds."

D. Billings & K. Blee, "Agriculture and Poverty in the KY Mountains: Beech Creek, 1850-1910."

View in Class: "The True Meaning of Pictures."

Oct. 13. Appalshop Workshop: The Music of Coal

Read, Waller, *Feud*, Part One, pp. 1-135.

**\*\*\*\*\* NOTE: Class will meet today in the John Jacob Niles Gallery.**

**\*\*\*\*\* First set of film reviews due today. (Because of necessary travel plans I will not be able to return these to you until Nov. 3.)**

Oct. 20. Appalachian Feuds as an Index of Change and Conflict.

Read, Waller, *Feud*, Part Two, pp. 139-249.

### B. The Industrial Transformation of Rural Appalachia.

Oct. 27. From Grapevine Creek to Matewan

Read, Giardina, *Storming Heaven*, pp. 1-128

View in Class: "Chairmaker"

**\*\*\*\*\* Take-Home Exam 2 Due Today (20% of course grade).**

Nov. 3. The Battle of Blair Mountain.

Read, Giardina, *Storming Heaven*, pp. 131-312.

View in Class: "Even the Heavens Weep"

Nov. 10. Hollywood (well, Independent Cinema) Views the WV Mine Wars

View in Class: "Matewan."

**C. Deindustrialization, Contemporary Social Life, & Continuing Struggles**

Nov. 17 "Organic Intellectuals" in the Appalachian Coalfields

Read, Giardina, *The Unquiet Earth*, Book One, pp. 13-181

View in Class: "Dreadful Memories," and "In My Own Way"

Nov. 24. Appalachia, the War on Poverty, and the Buffalo Creek Disaster

Read, Giardina, *The Unquiet Earth*, pp. 185-367.

View in Class: "The Buffalo Creek Flood."

Dec. 1. Labor Struggles in Documentary Film

View in Class: "Harlan County USA"

**\*\*\*\*\* Take-Home Exam 3 Due Today (35% of course grade) .**

Dec. 8. From MTR to the "Dancing Outlaw": What's Representation Got To Do With it?

View in Class: "The Dancing Outlaw"

**\*\*\*\*\* Second Set of Film Reviews Due Today.**