

**Border Ethnographies: The U.S. - Mexico Borderlands.**

**Ethnic Studies 289:**

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Spring 2007  
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Office Hours: Tues. 10:30-11:30  
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This is a course about exploring and doing ethnographies of the U.S. Mexico Border. Ethnography has long been a principal mechanism in representing and interpreting life on the border, yet this has often been isolated as a form of “community study” or focused on the transnational processes that bypass the border and its places. Our principle objective will be to explore ethnography and social interpretation that aims at capturing the complex social-cultural texture and arenas of life **on** the US-Mexico border-line. The paradox of a “first” world state (the U.S.) buttressed against/on Mexico illustrates and imposes structural (national) hierarchies in the economic, political (often imperial), and social-cultural. In addition to the national narrative, hierarchy is also played out in local and regional expressions of power, inequality, stratification, race, social process and culture. Ethnography provides a specific tool to expose and investigate this social reality from the perspective of border people and border sites. Although our principal objective is understanding and interpreting this border (land), a central tenet here is to identify and interrogate specific sites that spill into divergent realities on both sides of the geo-political line. Our goal here will be a critical reading of the ethnographic, in an effort to reveal and construct relevant methodologies that capture the fluidity and multi-sited nature of this border. This reading will include both literature about the ethnographic and actual ethnographies, film and music. The task here is to attempt new imaginations of this particular border, and multi-sited explorations of the ethnographic.

**Requirements for the Course:** This is a seminar in which reading and discussion are the basis of our exploration. All participants are expected to be prepared each class period to discuss the assigned readings.

**Course Assignments:**

**1) Reading response papers.** For each week=s assigned reading, class participants will write a response paper not to exceed two pages (double-spaced with one inch margins). These assignments are to be handed in at the end of each class on the day that reading is scheduled for discussion. Late papers will not be accepted.

**2) Term Paper.** Each student will be required to undertake a research project and to identify specific readings and other non-assigned material that adds to our exploration of the ethnographic on the Border. You are responsible for a term paper of about 15 pages in length on a topic that is pertinent to the ethnography of the border. **The paper is due on the final day of class Thursday June 5**

## **Schedule of Classes**

**April 3-** Introduction- Ethnography and the U.S. Mexico Border.

Film: *Chulas Fronteras*

**April 10-** Border Survey and the Ethnographic. Reading: Alvarez 1995, Heyman and Campbell 2004; Vila 2003 (Border Ethnographies) pp.- ix- xxxiii; Gille, Zsuza and Sean O. Riain 2002; Mintz 2000.

Film: *New World Border*

**April 17-** Maquiladoras: Reading: Fernandez-Kelly 1983

Film: *Señorita Extraviada*

**April 24-** Gender, Identity, and Space: Reading: Vila 2003: 1- 182

Film: *The Border Part I*

**May 1-** Border Control, Activism: Reading: Vila 2003: 182- 343

Film: *The Border Part II*

**May 8-** Music and Class: Reading: Edberg 2004:

Peña 1996- From *Ranchero* to *Jaitón* Ethnicity and Class in Texas-Mexican Music  
Musical tidbits

Film: (partial screening) *Una Vida de Peligros*

**May 15-** Cultural Poetics: Reading: Flores 2002

Jose Limon TBA

Film: *Lone Star*

**May 22-** Nationalism, identity and the local: Reading: Klein 1997

Film: *Ballad of an Unsung Hero.*

**May 29-** Nation and State. Reading: Donnan and Wilson 1999; Lugo 2000; Grimson and Vila 2003

**June 5-** Term **Papers due.** Reading: TBA – Class Selection:

### **Required Texts:**

Donnan, Hastings and Thomas M. Wilson

1999 Borders: Frontiers and Identity, Nation and State. Berg: Oxford and New York

Edberg, Mark

2004 El Narcotraficante. University of Texas Press.

Fernandez-Kelly, Patricia

1983 For We Are Sold, I and My People. Women and Industry in Mexico's Frontier.

Flores, Richard R.

2002 Remembering the Alamo: Memory, Modernity and the Master Symbol.  
University of Texas Press. ISBN 0-292-72540-X

Klein, Alan M.

1997 Baseball on the Border: A Tale of Two Laredos. Princeton University Press

Vila, Pablo

2003 *Ethnography at the Border*. University of Minnesota Press.

**Required Readings** (all readings are on PDF files and will be made available by Dr. Alvarez)

Alvarez, Robert R.

1995 *The Mexico-U.S. Border: The Making of an Anthropology of Borderlands*. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24, 447-470.

Cunningham, Hillary

2001 *Transnational Politics at the Edges of Sovereignty: Social Movements, Crossings and the State at the U.S. Mexico Border*. *Global Networks* 1 (4) 2001 369-387

Kearney, Michael

1991 *Borders and Boundaries of the State and Self at the End of Empire*. *J. Historical Sociology*. 4(1):52B74.

Mintz, Sidney

2000 *Cows Ears and Silver Linings: A Backward Look at Ethnography*. *Current Anthropology* 41(2) April 2000 169-188.

Heyman, Josiah McC. And Howard Campbell

2004 *Recent Work on the U.S. Mexico Border*. *Latin American Research Review* 39(3) October 2004, 205-220

Lugo, Alejandro

2000 *Theorizing Border Inspections*. *Cultural Dynamics* 12(3) 353-373

Gille, Zsuzsanna and Sean O. Riain

2002 *Global Ethnography*. *Annual Review of Sociology* 28, 278-295

Grimson, Alejandro and Pablo Vila

2002 *Forgotten Border Actors: The Border Reinforcers. A Comparison of the U.S. Mexico-Border and South American Borders*. *The Journal of Political Ecology*. Vol. 9, 2002, 70-88.

**Films**

*Chulas Fronteras-*

*New World Border-*

*Ballad of an Unsung Hero*

*The Border (part 1 and 2)*

*Lone Star*

*Señorita Extraviada-*

*Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*

**Recommended Texts**

Cook, Scott

1998 Mexican Brick Culture in the Building of Texas, 1800s-1980s.  
College Station: Texas A & M

- Garcia, Mario T.  
1995 Border Correspondent. Selected Writings. 1955-1970 Ruben Salazar.  
Berkeley:UC Press.
- Heyman, Josiah McC  
1991 *Life and Labor on the Border. Working People of Northeastern Sonora Mexico: 1886-1996.* Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Martinez, Oscar  
1999 Troublesome Border. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Martinez, Oscar  
1994 *Border People.* Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Prieto, Norma Iglesias  
1997 *Beautiful Flowers of the Maquiladora.* Austin:University of Texas.
- Salzinger, Leslie  
2003 Genders in Production. Berkeley: UC Press.
- Simonett, Helena  
2001 *Banda: Mexican Musical Life Across Borders.* Middletown:Wesleyan.
- Velez-Ibañez, Carlos  
1994 *Border Visions.* Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Ward, Peter  
1999 Colonias and Public Policy in Texas and Mexico. Urbanization by Stealth.  
Austin:UT Press: