Border Ethnographies: The U.S. - Mexico Borderlands.
Ethnic Studies 289:
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Spring 2007
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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*

   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  

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.*  
Klein, Alan M.  
Vila, Pablo  

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

Alvarez, Robert R.  

Cunningham, Hillary  

Kearney, Michael  

Mintz, Sidney  

Heyman, Josiah McC. And Howard Campbell  

Lugo, Alejandro  
2000 Theorizing Border Inspections. Cultural Dynamics 12(3) 353-373

Gille, Zsuza and Sean O. Riain  

Grimson, Alejandro and Pablo Vila  

**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.
    Berkeley: UC Press.

Heyman, Josiah McC
1991 Life and Labor on the Border. Working People of Northeastern Sonora

Martinez, Oscar

Martinez, Oscar

Prieto, Norma Iglesias
1997 Beautiful Flowers of the Maquiladora. Austin: University of Texas.

Salzinger, Leslie

Simonett, Helena

Velez-Ibañez, Carlos

Ward, Peter
    Austin: UT Press: