

# American Culture and Society

## SOCI 140



John Steuart Curry, *The Return of Private Davis*

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Fall 2019 MWF 1:00-1:52 p.m. ....Phone: x71118  
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*Significant elements of American elites are favorably disposed to America becoming a cosmopolitan society. Other elites wish it to assume an imperial role. The overwhelming bulk of the American people are committed to a national alternative and to preserving and strengthening the American identity that has existed for centuries. America becomes the world. The world becomes America. America remains America. Cosmopolitan? Imperial? National? The choices Americans make will shape their future as a nation and the future of the world.*  
*-Samuel Huntington*

## **What is this course about?**

It is about American society and culture, American history, American myth, and the American people.

If you are American, or if you're not but you've nonetheless spent a long time here, you may imagine you know a lot about American society and culture. What you know however may or may not be informed by the social scientific and historical tools that are needed to deeply understand the country, its culture, its history, its debates, and its trajectory. One of the goals of this course is to provide you some of those tools, or at least some of the information about the topic made available by their use.

Debates about the nature, history, present, and future of American society (or *any* society, for that matter) are an inevitable and valuable part of the process of coming to understand it. We will examine some of the chief such debates with the objective of clarifying them and giving you solid intellectual tools for making sense of them and articulating your own position with respect to them. Some such debates are unsettled, but some clearly involve positions that are more buttressed with evidence and solid argument than other positions, and we will look at both kinds of debates.

The course is multidisciplinary because no one discipline offers a complete perspective on the topic. Sociology, political science and political philosophy, economics, history, and literature are among the intellectual frameworks on which we will draw. Some specific background in the science of human behavior and social organization is very useful in this course. I have uploaded a series of PowerPoint slides modified from material I use in my Introduction to Sociology course to our course blog. You would do well to spend some time with them, especially at the beginning of the semester but also throughout the course of our engagement with the various topics we will explore, as they will give you important background on what a properly social scientific understanding of human nature and human relations looks like.

## **What will I learn in this course?**

You will acquire knowledge about the history and the culture of the United States of America.

You will be introduced to the ways in which individuals shape and are shaped by social groups and institutions.

You will be introduced to the ways in which human behavior shapes and is shaped by cultural beliefs and values.

You will learn to use a sociological framework of analysis to view and understand aspects of American social life.

You will learn social scientific concepts for understanding the origins, nature, and structure of American society.

College Core Curriculum designations: DUSC FRST SLSC SSLG

### **How will I be evaluated in this course?**

Students in this class have a responsibility to come to class prepared to engage in discussion, even though there may be nearly three dozen people in the class. I will lecture only sporadically, for short periods of time when necessary. But for the most part we will spend class time talking collectively about the texts we have read and the films we have viewed. It is expected that you will have *completed* the relevant reading in its entirety and/or seen the relevant films, and thought and written about them, *before* our class meetings.

*It is expected that you attend class.* I take attendance daily and there is a portion of the final grade that has directly and solely to do with attendance. If you have perfect attendance for the whole semester (which means you were physically in class every single time we met), you will receive extra credit on your final course grade.

You will be doing a good deal of reading in this class, and you will be writing about much if not all of that reading. Much of your writing in the class will be commented on in one fashion or another by your peers. Each of you will in turn be commenting frequently on the writing of other students. The only way this class can work effectively, and students can advance in their ability to think, speak, and write intelligently about the topics at hand, is if all of us take seriously our responsibility to respond helpfully and critically to the communications of others and to take heed of the commentary of others on our own communications and modify them accordingly. We will spend the entire first day of class talking about these responsibilities, and I will ask you to sign a contract pledging your adherence to the system. If you are not prepared to uphold your end of the contract, then you harm not only your own experience in the class, but the experiences of everyone else as well.

Although I will read everything you write in this class, and I will comment on much of it in class and especially on the blog, I will restrict 'grading' of most work to simply noting when work does not meet requirements for basic adequacy, that is, when you submit poor work. If a piece of writing does not receive any substantive remark from me, you can assume it was at least adequate. The only writing I will grade with the standard A-F scale is the portfolio of polished writing you submit at the end of the semester. All other writing in the course is graded

according to adequate completion, i.e., if you complete it and it is not poorly done, it will receive full credit.

Every student will be assigned a number of readings and films for expository writing (approximately 6 per student over the course of the semester). We will typically organize class meetings around these expository presentations of readings. On any given such class meeting, several students will have the responsibility to post such short writings (at least 250 words) about longer texts the whole class is reading (in addition to bringing a hard copy for me), and everyone will be expected to read those short texts as well as the longer texts. We will then allow the student writers of the expository text to kick-off our discussion of the reading. It will be the task of those students to give the class a few central points to consider in the reading and ask at least one question intended to provoke discussion. For each class day, a small number of other students will have primary 'discussant' responsibilities for that day, i.e., they will be expected to be first in line to respond to the expository introduction. This does not let others in the class off the hook on those days. It simply tells us who are the first people I will call on.

Beyond these expository analyses of readings, you will be writing two short essays (500-700 words each) in response to prompts I will provide. These will be posted on the blog and other students will be assigned responsibility to comment on them (see attachment on protocol for writing such commentaries). Every other Friday, class meetings will be dedicated to discussion of these student essays in small groups. At the end of the semester, you will submit a portfolio of your most polished writing over the course of the semester (1,500-2,000 words), and you will be expected to use commentary from your fellow students to polish essays or other blog entries you submit as part of this portfolio.

You will also be asked to write more general entries on the blog, prompted by class discussions, class debates (which will take place every other Wednesday), or other course-related matters. Here, you have more license to pick and choose what to write about. Some suggestions as to how to think about such blog posts: these might consist of your questions about readings (as in, "I didn't quite understand what the author is saying about X, but here's what I think is going on—is that right, or at least close? Help!"), as well as your responses to the questions of others; your responses to questions or topics that I have posted to the blog; your reflection on readings we have done that you were not given as expository assignments; your observations about e.g., news items or other material from outside class that in your view can be effectively understood or analyzed using course materials.

Basically speaking, the blog is an online extension of our class discussions plus additional reflection and conversation for which we did not have time in class. *It is an invaluable learning tool, and I take it very seriously.* If you want to do well in the course, and if you want to take full advantage of our time together to significantly push your own knowledge and abilities, you should take it very seriously too.

You must make *at least* three entries per week on the blog (including expository analyses, short essays, and responses to writing of other students). That's a minimum of 45 entries total, and the minimum word count for the total is 7500 words. That works out to 500 per week (the writing portfolio submitted at the end of the semester should not be included in the blog word count). *At least 15 of the total entries you write over the course of the semester must be in direct response to something another class member has written.* You have to write consistently on the blog throughout the semester.

At four points during the semester, you will need to turn in a hard copy of the entirety of your writing on the blog. At the beginning of the document, you should note the number of entries and the total word count, and there should be a word count and date above each individual entry. These four check-in points are given in the schedule below. *If at any of the four check-in points, you do not hand in a copy of your blog record, or if your blog writing is not at the minimal entry and word count assigned at that check-in, this will substantially negatively affect your grade, even if by the end of the semester you make the total of 45 and the minimum word count.* Participating in the blog regularly throughout the whole semester is an integral element of the course pedagogy, and if you do not do this, you will cheat yourself of opportunities to learn and to become a better thinker and writer. I will also sometimes direct us to things on the blog in class discussions. If you write considerably more than the minimum word count over the course of the semester—at least 9,000 words—I will give you an extra credit boost on your final course grade.

I will respond to your writing on the blog as frequently as I am able. You should see all responses, whether from me or other class members, as invitations to further dialogue, not as conclusions of exchanges.

I do not grade blog writing according to content, although any blog writing that consists simply of rote reiteration or copying of lecture or reading materials will not be counted and I reserve the right to ask you to rewrite posts or responses that are not sufficiently coherent to be understood. If you have the minimum number of entries and total words at each of the four blog check-in points, you will get an A on this portion of the course. Let me say this another way: *a very significant chunk of your grade in this course is completely in your control.* You do yourself a great disservice if you do not take advantage of it.

You must save all your blog writing in a text file that can easily be emailed to me at the end of the semester.

The formal grading breakdown is as follows:

- 1. Attendance: 25%**
- 2. Blog writing: 50%**

### 3. Final Portfolio: 25%

#### What University policies are in force in this course?

Bucknell students are responsible for the preparation and presentation of work representing their own efforts. Acceptance of this responsibility is essential to the educational process and must be considered as an expression of mutual trust, the foundation upon which creative scholarship rests. Students are directed to use great care when preparing all written work (including journal entries) and to acknowledge fully the source of all ideas and language other than their own.

I fully support the above principles and the institutional process that deals with violations of academic responsibility at Bucknell. I will not hesitate to initiate this process if the above mentioned “mutual trust” is violated in my course. In addition, it is important that you recognize that there may be instances when collaboration is appropriate in my class and other instances when it is not. Absent specific instructions to the contrary, you are to assume that all assignments are to be completed without collaboration. Finally, in acknowledging the source of all ideas and language other than your own, you must cite the creator of Internet posted information just as you would an author of a textbook, a journal article, a reference book, emails, or personal conversations from which you have used information or ideas.

Courses at Bucknell that receive one unit of academic credit have a minimum expectation of 12 hours per week of student academic engagement. Student academic engagement includes both the hours of direct faculty instruction and the hours spent on out of class student work. It is likely that you will need to spend more than this minimum expected amount of time per week to do work above C-level (though you should also note that simply spending the minimum 12 hours per week is itself no guarantee that you will receive at least a C in the course).

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact Heather Fowler, Director of the Office of Accessibility Resources at 570-577-1188.

#### Bucknell University Honor Code

As a student and citizen of the Bucknell University community:

- I will not lie, cheat or steal in my academic endeavors.
- I will forthrightly oppose each and every instance of academic dishonesty.
- I will let my conscience guide my decision to communicate directly with any person or persons I believe to have been dishonest in academic work.
- I will let my conscience guide my decision on reporting breaches of academic integrity to the appropriate faculty or deans.

#### Class Policy on Debate and Expression

It is not the proper role of the University to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive. Although all members of the University community share in the responsibility for maintaining a climate of mutual respect, concerns about civility and mutual respect can never be used as a justification for closing off discussion of ideas, however offensive or disagreeable those ideas may be to some members of our community. The University may restrict expression that violates the law, that falsely defames a specific individual, that constitutes a genuine threat or harassment, that unjustifiably invades substantial privacy or confidentiality interests, or that is otherwise directly incompatible with the functioning of the University. But it is vitally important that these exceptions never be used in a manner that is inconsistent with the University's commitment to a completely free and open discussion of ideas. Although members of the University community are free to criticize and contest the views expressed on campus, and to criticize and contest speakers who are invited to express their views on campus, they may not obstruct or otherwise interfere with the freedom of others to express views.

There are long-established, generally reliable rules of comportment for critical engagement and contestation in academic settings, and this classroom is such a setting. Allowing interlocutors to speak and express their arguments is but the first part of that set of interactional rules. Beyond this, we are all required to show outward signs of our acceptance of open dialogue and basic mutual respect and magnanimity. *Ad hominem* claims should be avoided and critical remarks should always be directed to arguments rather than to persons. Even (*especially*) when you disagree vehemently with something that is being said, it is obligatory to refrain from using gestures and expressions that betray a lack of respect and generosity, i.e., rolling your eyes, demonstratively sighing or interrupting, etc. Breaking the rules of academic comportment destroys the possibility of critical discussion, and we cannot allow it to jeopardize our central task in the course. An important part of the pedagogy of the course involves learning skills in dispassionate, logical, and calm discussion and debate, even (*especially*) when you are highly emotionally exercised by some particular question or topic. All of us have such emotional investments, but there simply is no reasonable way in which all of our personal emotional investments can be fairly accommodated in collective inquiry into difficult material. Allowing our emotions to dictate how we react and how we contest claims is a sure recipe for accomplishing nothing that is intellectually useful.

### **Class Policy on Electronic Devices**

*No tablets, laptop computers, cell phones, or other electronic devices may be used during class.* If you absolutely must bring your phone to class, please be sure the ringer is OFF and keep it in your pocket, backpack, or wherever you store it.

### **What books do I need to acquire for this course?**

1. George Borjas, *We Wanted Workers*
2. Victor Davis Hanson, *The Case for Trump*
3. Samuel Huntington, *Who Are We?*
4. Cormac McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses*
5. Mark Regnerus, *Cheap Sex*
6. Amy Wax, *Race, Wrongs, and Remedies*

There are also a few readings that can be accessed via links provided at the blog. All of the books are either on physical class reserves in the library (1-5) or available as e-Books in the library's online holdings (6).

<b>SOCIOLOGY 140 AMERICAN SOCIETY FA 2019</b>					
	<b>date</b>	<b>class topic</b>	<b>reading to be completed</b>	<b>films to view</b>	<b>student writing assignments (ERA=Expository Reading Analysis; SE=Short Essay; RSE=Respondent to Short Essay)</b>
Mon	26- Aug	Introduction to course	n/a		
Wed	28- Aug	American Origins: Alexis de Tocqueville's Democracy in America	Alexis de Tocqueville, <i>Democracy in America</i> excerpts ("How Equality Suggests to the Americans the Indefinite Perfectibility of Man") ONLINE		
Fri	30- Aug	American Origins: Alexis de Tocqueville's Democracy in America	Alexis de Tocqueville, <i>Democracy in America</i> excerpts (The Exterior Form of North America; Origin of the Anglo-Americans, and the Importance of this Origin		



			in Relation to their Future Condition; Social Condition of the Anglo-Americans) ONLINE		
Mon	2-Sep	American Origins: Alexis de Tocqueville's Democracy in America	Alexis de Tocqueville, <i>Democracy in America</i> excerpts (The Present and Probably Future Condition of the Three Races that Inhabit the Territory of the United States, up to section titled "What Are the Chances of Duration of the American Union, and What Dangers Threaten It") ONLINE		
Wed	4-Sep	Debate and Film Discussion Day		<i>Shane</i>	Short essays due
Fri	6-Sep	Essay Workshop			<b>FIRST BLOG CHECK-IN (at least 6 entries and 1000 words)</b>
Mon	9-Sep	American Culture Historically: The Crisis of American National Identity	<i>Who Are We?</i> , chapters 1-2		
Wed	11-Sep	Components of American National Identity: Anglo-Protestant Culture	<i>Who Are We?</i> , chapters 3-4	<i>The Witch</i>	
Fri	13-Sep	Christianity in American Culture and History	<i>Who Are We?</i> , chapter 5	<i>United 93</i>	
Mon	16-Sep	The American Nation Triumphant, then	<i>Who Are We?</i> , chapter 6		

		Eroding			
Wed	18-Sep	Debate and Film Discussion Day		<i>Saving Private Ryan</i>	Short essays due
Fri	20-Sep	Essay Workshop			
Mon	23-Sep	American Myth: "Everything's talk, isnt it?...Not everything"	<i>All the Pretty Horses</i> , pp. 1-59		
Wed	25-Sep	"...as he was drifting to sleep his thoughts were of horses and of the open country and of horses"	<i>All the Pretty Horses</i> , pp. 59-139		
Fri	27-Sep	"what a man wont see when he aint got a gun"	<i>All the Pretty Horses</i> , pp. 139-217		<b>SECOND BLOG CHECK-IN (at least 15 entries and 2500 words)</b>
Mon	30-Sep	"he held out his hands...perhaps as if to slow the world that was rushing away and seemed to care nothing...for the living or the dead"	<i>All the Pretty Horses</i> , pp. 219-conclusion		
Wed	2-Oct	Debate and Film Discussion Day		<i>No Country for Old Men</i>	Short essays due
Fri	4-Oct	Essay Workshop			
Mon	7-Oct	Deconstructing America: The Rise of Subnational Identities and Assimilation: Converts, Ampersands, and	<i>Who Are We?</i> , chapters 7-8	<i>Bonnie and Clyde</i>	

		the Erosion of Citizenship			
Wed	9-Oct	Black and White in Contemporary America: Disparities and Dilemmas	<i>Races, Wrongs, and Remedies</i> , pp. 1-70		
Fri	11-Oct	Black and White in Contemporary America: Disparities and Dilemmas	<i>Races, Wrongs, and Remedies</i> , pp. 71-140		
Mon	14-Oct	<b>No Class Fall Break</b>			
Wed	16-Oct	Debate and Film Discussion Day		<i>Hoop Dreams</i>	Short essays due
Fri	18-Oct	Essay Workshop			
Mon	21-Oct	Transforming America: Mexican Immigration and Hispanization	<i>Who Are We?</i> , chapter 9; <i>We Wanted Workers</i> , chapters 1-2		
Wed	23-Oct	Immigration Policy: Who Comes and Why	<i>We Wanted Workers</i> , chapters 3-4		
Fri	25-Oct	Economic Assimilation and Labor Market Impact	<i>We Wanted Workers</i> , chapters 5-7		
Mon	28-Oct	The Economic Benefits and the Fiscal Impact of Immigration	<i>We Wanted Workers</i> , chapters 8-10		
Wed	30-Oct	Debate and Film Discussion Day		<i>De Nadie (No One)</i>	Short essays due
Fri	1-	Essay Workshop			<b>THIRD BLOG</b>

	Nov				<b><i>CHECK-IN (at least 30 entries and 5000 words)</i></b>
Mon	4-Nov	Cheap Sex and the Modern American Mating Market	<i>Cheap Sex</i> , chapters 1-2		
Wed	6-Nov	Contemporary Sex in America: Cheaper, Faster, Better, More?	<i>Cheap Sex</i> , chapter 3		
Fri	8-Nov	The Cheapest Sex: Pornography and American Culture	<i>Cheap Sex</i> , chapter 4		
Mon	11-Nov	The Transformation of Men, Marriage and Monogamy and the Genital Life	<i>Cheap Sex</i> , chapters 5-6	<i>The Exorcist</i>	
Wed	13-Nov	Debate and Film Discussion Day		<i>Kramer vs. Kramer</i>	Short essays due
Fri	15-Nov	Essay Workshop			
Mon	18-Nov	Merging America with the World and Fault Lines Old and New	<i>Who Are We?</i> , chapters 10-11		
Wed	20-Nov	America 2016 and Beyond: What and Who Created Trump?	<i>The Case for Trump</i> , chapters 1-3		
Fri	22-Nov	An Establishment Without Answers	<i>The Case for Trump</i> , chapters 4-6	<i>Dark Days</i>	
Mon	25-Nov	<b>No Class Thanksgiving Break</b>			
Wed	27-Nov				
Fri	29-Nov				
Mon	2-Nov	Trump	<i>The Case for Trump</i> ,		

	Dec	Metaphysics	chapters 7 and 9		
Wed	4- Dec	The Ordeal of President Trump	<i>The Case for Trump</i> , chapters 10-11		
Fri	6- Dec	Debate and Film Discussion Day		<i>Apollo 11</i>	<b>FOURTH BLOG CHECK-IN (at least 45 entries and 7500 words)</b> Short essays due
Mon	9- Dec	Essay Workshop			

