

**How Americans Think  
(SOCI 210B)  
Spring 2011  
Mon. & Wedn. 4-5:15pm  
208 Davis Hall**

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*“For better or worse, America is the 800-pound gorilla in every room in the world. When it has an itch, the world scratches. When it gets a cold, the world sneezes.”*

*Peter Schuck and James Q. Wilson, Understanding America*

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Whether you are, or consider yourself an American or not, if you are curious to learn about how Americans think, to understand better what makes Americans tick, and to see what many Americans do not see about themselves, this course is for you.

The United States has long had a large economic, political and cultural impact on the world, but with the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the United States became the only world superpower. Americans constitute at once the most prolific consumers, some of the most productive workers, and the electors of the most powerful and far-reaching government in the world. This makes what Americans think and do important in unprecedented ways. This course aims to deepen our sense of how Americans think. More specifically, we will explore not just American opinions on various public issues, but also the underlying values and frames which structure those opinions. In order to more richly understand the American mind, this course will compare Americans present with Americans past, Americans with other peoples of the world, and contemporary Americans by religion, region, race and other factors.

The academic literature on American society is breathtakingly vast and ever growing. The same goes for the sub-field of American studies devoted to the American mind, or American character. Rather than try to mad dash through this vast literature in one semester, our course readings, lectures and discussions will focus on the following five themes and questions:

- Part 1: Americans: Of One Mind, or Many?
- Part 2: Comparing Americans with Other Peoples
- Part 3: French-American Cultural Differences and Boundary-Making
- Part 4: American Individualism and Community
- Part 5: Are Americans Divided and Dividing Further?

As the above themes suggest, this course explores Americans' commonalities as well as their differences. This course also considers how Americans compare with other peoples, such as the Japanese, Canadians, and the French, in order to clarify what is distinctive about Americans. As you will discover, the course readings very often address similar concepts and issues. Some of the concepts central to this course are: individualism, community, freedom, and equality. Some of the fundamental issues central to this course include the relations between the individual and community, freedom and equality, citizen and government.

This course is in sociology, but blends philosophy, history, psychology and political science. You will wrestle with a lot of questions and issues you have probably not wrestled with before. Some of this wrestling may be confusing, contentious, and/or transformative. *I urge you to keep an open mind, to respect differences, and be open to changing how you think, not to assume that yours or the majority's views are best.* In the end, you may come out of this course a different person. The way you think about yourself, about Americans, the United States, and the wider world will likely change and deepen to some extent, maybe for years to come, maybe for the rest of your life.

### **COURSE GOALS**

- 1) Develop a richer sense of the range of values and ways of thinking that structure American public discourse.
- 2) Nurture a clearer and deeper sense of your own values and ways of thinking, their cultural context, and alternatives.
- 3) Deepen appreciation for cultural differences, and correspondingly develop skepticism toward the tendency to assume that one's own values and ways of thinking are natural, logical, and/or right.
- 4) Practice sociological investigation by writing a paper that involves original focus group or interview research.

### **REQUIRED READINGS**

In addition to a reader available at cost from the Department of Sociology and Anthropology (see Diana Smith in the Department's main office), there are four books available at the Stetson Bookstore:

- 1) *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* by Seymour Martin Lipset
- 2) *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* by Morris P. Fiorina et al.
- 3) *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* by Robert Bellah et al.
- 4) *Money, Morals & Manners* by Michele Lamont

The above books are not beach reading; you may find them difficult to understand at times. If you find you do not understand something as you read, circle/underline it, or put a question mark by it, and raise your question(s) in class. You are probably not the only one who will benefit from your questions, so please do not be shy about asking. Questions also benefit your class participation grade.

### COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Two tests (25% each)	50%
Research proposal	10%
Research paper	20%
Class engagement	20%

#### **The two tests (25% each)**

The two comprehension tests will cover the readings and my lectures. I will post my lectures on Blackboard. Each of the tests will be composed of an essay question, short answer questions, and a sprinkling of multiple choice, true/false, and/or fill-in-the-blank questions. You will get a list of questions in advance of each test, from which I will pick the actual test questions. In other words, you will get the test questions ahead of the test, and accordingly will not need to guess what will be on the test. In addition, I will hold a two-hour test preparation session usually the night before each test. Thus, if you study thoroughly and carefully, you should do well on the tests. The dates of the tests are indicated below under “Course Schedule.”

On test days, there will be no assigned reading, and you will have the entire class time to complete the test. *Once the test is handed out, you cannot leave the room. If you leave the room, you must hand in your test, and you cannot come back to finish it. Accordingly, make sure to go to the bathroom before class on test days. Also, please do not cheat. If I catch you cheating on a test, you will automatically get a 0% on the test, and I am obliged to report the cheating to Stetson’s Honor Council.*

#### **The research proposal (10%) and research paper (20%)**

In order to develop your ability to conduct social science research, you will write a research paper based on our course readings and any other relevant academic sources plus original interviews or a survey you conduct on a question(s) that interests you. You will first write a research proposal that lays out your topic and research question(s), the import of that question(s) given existing academic literature, the research method you plan to use to answer your question, and your proposed survey or interview instrument. I will explain the guidelines for both your research proposal and your research paper in greater detail separately.

*Proposals and papers received within the 24 hours after their respective deadlines will be graded down half a grade (e.g., A- to B+, or B to B-). Proposals and*

*papers will be graded down a full letter grade (e.g., B to C, or A- to B-) for every 24 hour time span thereafter. In other words, it is in your interest to email me your proposal and paper by their respective deadlines if not sooner!*

### **Class engagement (20%)**

Class engagement is comprised of three things: (a) attendance, (b) themes and quotes, and (c) participation:

Attendance: I expect you to attend every class, and will accordingly take attendance at the start of each class. *If you are more than five minutes late to class by my watch, I will not count you as attending, though you may still earn participation points by participating even if you arrive late to class.* Please let me know *in advance* if you cannot make a class. Medical or team-related absences are acceptable, with a note from your doctor or coach, including their contact information.

Themes and quotes: It is essential that you do the assigned reading in order for us to have an informed dialogue in class, and for you to learn and do well on the assigned tests and research paper. Accordingly, *I expect you to bring to each class for which we have a reading at least three themes and quotes from the reading.* I will post a model of this assignment on Blackboard. While we will not have a chance to have each student report their themes and quotes in class, we will regularly discuss themes and quotes in class, I may on any given day ask you to tell us about your chosen themes and quotes, and you will all hand me your own themes and quotes at the end of each class. I will not hand these themes and quotes back to you, but they will constitute part of your class engagement grade.

Participation: In my experience as both a teacher and student, students pay more attention, feel more interested, and learn better when they are active participants in the class conversation, rather than strictly listeners. Thus, your participation in class is highly valued. You will have plenty of opportunities to participate as I will frequently pose comprehension questions, and solicit your reflections about the readings and related social issues. *Importantly, grounding your participation in the readings, rather than just your opinion, is most valuable to our class and to your participation grade (e.g., “Lipset says that...but I think...” or “What does Lamont mean when she says...” or “Tocqueville argued...and Bellah and his colleagues add that...”).*

If you're shy about participating in front of everyone, one way you might participate is to simply pose questions about the reading, or lecture. I will not always have the answer, and even when I do, I will at times encourage you all to propose answers to each other's questions. Conversely, for those of you who tend to participate a lot, I urge you to get in the habit of waiting to allow those who participate less to speak first.

While we do discuss facts in this course, we also interpret what the authors we read are saying. These authors in turn offer particular interpretations of American

culture. Interpretations are better understood as arguments rather facts or firm answers, so they are often up for debate. That said, not all interpretations are right. Interpretations in part vary in their adherence to the facts. The more you can back up your interpretation with facts and/or textual references, the firmer your interpretation may become in class discussions and your research paper.

## CLASS CONDUCT

Please adhere to the following basic rules for class conduct:

- 1) Do not read books, magazines, newspapers, etc. during class unless instructed to do so.
- 2) Do not listen to headphones during class.
- 3) *Do not arrive late to class and do not leave early. If you must arrive late or leave early for a compelling reason, please notify me in advance.*
- 4) *Do not walk out of class once it has begun unless you are ill or it is absolutely necessary to leave. Please get in the habit of getting a drink or going to the bathroom before or after class, not during class.*
- 5) Do not talk to other classmates while the professor or another student is speaking. This means no personal conversations on the side.
- 6) Raise your hand to be recognized before you begin speaking.
- 7) Do not interrupt anyone who is speaking.
- 8) Use a reasonable tone of voice when speaking in class.
- 9) During class discussions do not curse at or otherwise disrespect anyone.
- 10) *Do not bring your computer to class. Use paper to take notes if you wish, though note that I will post all my lecture notes on Blackboard.*
- 11) *Turn off your cell phone during class and put your cell phone out of sight.*
- 12) *Once you have begun an exam or quiz, you may not leave the class until you have finished your exam or quiz. If you leave the class during your quiz or exam, you may not return to complete the exam.*

## GRADING SCALE

The grading scale in this course is as follows:

- A+ = 97-100%
- A = 94-96%
- A- = 90-93%
- B+ = 87-89%
- B = 84-86%
- B- = 80-83%
- C+ = 77-79%
- C = 74-76%
- C- = 70-73%

D+ = 67-69%  
D = 64-66%  
D- = 60-63%  
F = 59% and below

**STETSON UNIVERSITY  
GENERAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE  
STATEMENT**

In order to assure that Stetson University is meeting its goals in providing an excellent General Education, the College has established specific General Education Learning Outcomes for all courses meeting a particular area requirement in the General Education curriculum. To monitor how well students are meeting those outcomes, instructors of those courses regularly submit work to the committees assessing each outcome. While the outcomes of these assessments are primarily for our internal use in monitoring and enhancing our curriculum, we may occasionally report the results of these assessments in published research or academic conferences. All such reports will include aggregate (not individual) data and will not include information that could identify the student or the instructor. While the use of this information within the institution is part of normal educational practice, you may choose **not to allow** data derived from your own work to be used for published reports or presentations by signing an “opt out” form in the Registrar’s office.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY, PLAGIARISM, COLLUSION  
AND THE  
UNIVERSITY HONOR CODE**

From the Stetson University Honor Code Webpage:  
<http://www.stetson.edu/honorsystem/>  
<http://www.stetson.edu/honorsystem/pledge.php>

**Preamble**

As an institution of higher learning, Stetson University depends upon its members—students, faculty, staff, and administration—to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity. Without a commitment to this ideal, the foundation of our educational mission is undermined, and truth—the ultimate goal of our pursuits at the university—loses its meaning and force. The Honor System seeks to nourish a vital campus culture, one where students, faculty, administration, and staff are mutually committed to pursuing truth in a spirit of cooperation and respect. Laws and rules exist to protect a society and its members, but truly to flourish, a community relies upon the individual to take responsibility for his or her actions and to uphold certain bedrock principles. The Honor System specifies actions that are harmful to the community and establishes ways of dealing with those who violate basic standards. But the primary justification for the

Honor System is that it challenges individuals to reflect upon the ethical issues they face as members of a university and encourages them to take positive steps to maintain the integrity of themselves and their community. Moreover, by affirming student self-governance in the form of an Honor Council, this Honor System underscores the central roles that both students and faculty play in upholding academic integrity.

### **The Honor Pledge**

- A. The Honor Pledge is a promise made by undergraduates to uphold high standards of integrity and honesty in their academic work. By enrolling in Stetson University, students commit themselves to abide by the principles and spirit of the Honor System. They will be asked to demonstrate that commitment by signing a written pledge that will be kept on file by the Honor Council.
- B. Faculty are encouraged to underscore the continuing vitality of the Honor Pledge by having students reaffirm their promise when turning in tests, quizzes, papers, or other assignments. For the purposes of assignments, a student who writes the word "Pledged" followed by her or his signature is understood to be reaffirming her or his commitment to the principles of the Honor System.
- C. The Pledge: As a member of Stetson University, I agree to uphold the highest standards of integrity in my academic work. I promise that I will neither give nor receive unauthorized aid of any kind on my tests, papers, and assignments. When using the ideas, thoughts, or words of another in my work, I will always provide clear acknowledgement of the individuals and sources on which I am relying. I will avoid using fraudulent, falsified, or fabricated evidence and/or material. I will refrain from resubmitting without authorization work for one class that was obtained from work previously submitted for academic credit in another class. I will not destroy, steal, or make inaccessible any academic resource material. By my actions and my example, I will strive to promote the ideals of honesty, responsibility, trust, fairness, and respect that are at the heart of Stetson's Honor System.

### **Plagiarism & Collusion:**

Refer to your "Guide to Plagiarism and Collusion", which defines plagiarism and collusion, and explains the correct format for direct quotations from another person's work. Be sure to correctly cite any direct quotations, and correctly reference paraphrasing of theorists' words. If there are examples of plagiarism and/or collusion in the paper, the grade will be lowered one letter grade for every incidence of uncited references and plagiarism. For example, if you have one incidence of plagiarism and your grade was a 90, you will receive an 80 on that assignment. If you have three incidences of plagiarism, and your grade was 90, then you will receive a grade of 60. If you have more than three incidents of plagiarism in your paper you will receive a '0'. Students who have cheated, plagiarized or colluded will be reported to the Honor Council, according to University policy.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### Wednesday, January 12:

- 1) Introductions
- 2) Written exercise
- 3) Discussion of the syllabus
- 4) Introduction to Tocqueville reading

### Monday, January 17:

No classes – Martin Luther King Day.

## PART 1: AMERICANS: OF ONE MIND, OR MANY?

### Wednesday, January 19:

Reading due for today's class:

In course packet: Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, p.9-20 (Introduction), 31-47, 237-45, 254-6 (about 40 pages).

### Monday, January 24:

Reading due for today's class:

In course packet: Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, 452-4, 506-8, 535-8, 561-5, 604-5, 614-6, 690-5 (about 25 pages).

### Wednesday, January 26:

Reading due for today's class:

In course packet: Michael J. Weiss, *The Clustered World*, p.9-32 (23 pages)

## PART 2: COMPARING AMERICANS WITH OTHER PEOPLES

### Monday, January 31:

Reading due for today's class:

*American Exceptionalism* by Seymour Martin Lipset, Introduction and Chapter 1 (p.17-52) (36 pages).

### Wednesday, February 2:

Reading due for today's class:

*American Exceptionalism* by Seymour Martin Lipset, Chapters 2 & 3 (p.53-96, 108-9 – skip “Cross-Border Union Densities” on p.96-108) (46 pages).

### Monday, February 7:

Reading due for today's class:

*American Exceptionalism* by Seymour Martin Lipset, Chapter 7 (p.211-263) (53 pages).

### Wednesday, February 9:

Reading due for today's class:

*American Exceptionalism* by Seymour Martin Lipset, Conclusion and Appendix (p.267-296) (30 pages).

### **PART 3: FRENCH-AMERICAN CULTURAL DIFFERENCES & BOUNDARY-MAKING**

#### **Monday, February 14:**

Reading due for today's class:

In course packet: *Cultural Misunderstandings* by Raymonde Carroll, Chapter 1 (p.13-21) and Chapter 3 (p.40-57) (27 pages).

#### **Wednesday, February 16:**

Reading due for today's class:

*Money, Morals & Manners* by Michele Lamont, Prologue & Chapter 1 (p.xix-xxix, 1-23) (34 pages).

#### **Monday, February 21:**

Reading due for today's class:

*Money, Morals & Manners* by Michele Lamont, Chapters 2 (p.24-61) (37 pages).

HOLD A ONE-ON-ONE MEETING WITH ME before spring break to discuss your tentative plans for the research paper. Come to our meeting with ideas or a written skeleton of your draft research proposal.

#### **Wednesday, February 23:**

Reading due for today's class:

*Money, Morals & Manners* by Michele Lamont, Chapters 3 (p.62-87) (26 pages).

#### **Monday, February 28:**

Reading due for today's class:

*Money, Morals & Manners* by Michele Lamont, Chapters 4 (p.88-128) (41 pages).

#### **Wednesday, March 2:**

Reading due for today's class:

*Money, Morals & Manners* by Michele Lamont, Chapters 5 (p.129-149) (21 pages).

#### **Monday-Friday, March 7-11**

#### **Spring Break**

### **PART 4: AMERICAN INDIVIDUALISM AND COMMUNITY**

#### **Monday, March 14:**

Reading due for today's class:

*Habits of the Heart* by Robert Bellah et al, Chapters 1 & 2 (p.3-51) (49 pages).

**Wednesday, March 16:**

FIRST COMPREHENSION TEST. You will have the entire class time to complete the test.

**Monday, March 21:**

Reading due for today's class:

*Habits of the Heart* by Robert Bellah et al, Chapters 3 & 4 (p.55-112) (58 pages).

**Wednesday, March 23:**

Reading due for today's class:

*Habits of the Heart* by Robert Bellah et al, Chapters 5 & 6 (p.113-163) (51 pages).

**Friday, March 25:**

DUE BY NOON TODAY: Your research proposal to me via email. Please email me your proposal as a Microsoft Word document.

**Monday, March 28:**

Reading due for today's class:

*Habits of the Heart* by Robert Bellah et al, Chapters 7 & 8 (p.167-218) (52 pages).

**Wednesday, March 30:**

Reading due for today's class:

*Habits of the Heart* by Robert Bellah et al, Chapters 9 & 10 (p.219-271) (53 pages).

**PART 5: ARE AMERICANS DIVIDED AND DIVIDING FURTHER?**

**Monday, April 4:**

Reading due for today's class:

*American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* by Seymour Martin Lipset, Chapter 4 (p.113-150) (38 pages).

**Wednesday, April 6:**

Reading due for today's class:

In course packet: Bill Bishop, *The Big Sort* (Introduction), p.1-15.

**Monday, April 11:**

Reading due for today's class:

In course packet: *One Nation, Afterall* by Alan Wolfe, Chapter 7 (275-322) (48 pages).

**Wednesday, April 13:**

Reading due for today's class:

*Culture War?* by Morris Fiorina et al., Preface to First Edition, Chapters 1-2 (p.xv-xvii, 1-32) (35 pages).

**Monday, April 18:**

Reading due for today's class:

*Culture War?* by Morris Fiorina et al., Chapters 3-4 (p.33-78) (46 pages).

**Wednesday, April 20:**

Reading due for today's class:

*Culture War?* by Morris Fiorina et al., Chapters 5-6 (p.79-126) (48 pages).

**Friday, April 22**

**DUE BY 5PM TODAY:** Your research paper to me via email. Please email me your research paper as a Microsoft Word document.

**Monday, April 25**

Reading due for today's class:

*Culture War?* by Morris Fiorina et al., Chapters 7 and 10 (p.127-143, 187-228) (61 pages).

**Wednesday, April 27:**

**(Last day of class)**

No reading for today. We will engage in a structured reflection on what we've learned over the course of the semester.

**Tuesday, May 3:**

**SECOND/FINAL COMPREHENSION TEST**, 11am-1pm, in our classroom. You will have the entire two hours to complete the test.