BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY
Department of Anthropology

ANTH 121a
Crossing Cultural Boundaries
Fall 2016

Richard J. Parmentier
rparmentier@brandeis.edu
Brown 221, 736-2220

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course, designed for both undergraduates and graduate students, examines historical and contemporary situations where individuals and social groups, actually or imaginatively, willingly or unwillingly, cross the boundaries separating their home cultures and some foreign, strange, or distant place. The understandings and misunderstandings, tolerances and intolerances, resulting from these border-crossing encounters are examined in primary texts, contemporary images, historical narratives, and cinematic reconstructions. Examples of momentary, transient or accidental experiences (explorers, pilgrims, castaways, tourists, etc.) are compared with situations where interpersonal and institutional relations develop over longer periods of time (frontier settlements, imperial colonies, slave plantations, ports of trade, etc.). Potentials for reflexive self-understanding and respectful intercultural dialogue are evaluated from both fictional and non-fictional representations of these intercultural experiences. During the semester there will be eight illustrated lectures; images and outlines of the lectures will be posted on LATTE. We will view excerpts from a number of films and documentaries; the rest of class time will be devoted to discussing the assigned readings.

COURSE RATING: The readings, lectures, and assignments of this course are rated as “moderately difficult.”

REQUIREMENTS AND CLASS PROCEDURES: There are four graded requirements for the course: (1) First Essay Assignment (25%); (2) Second Essay Assignment (25%); (3) Third Essay Assignment (25%); and (4) active, informed, and regular participation in class discussion (25%). The three essay questions are given at the end of this syllabus. Unexcused lateness in turning in written assignments is penalized by the loss of one-third of a letter grade for that assignment. Extensions are automatically given for lateness caused by circumstances beyond your control (e.g., illness, family emergency, hard drive failure, lost pet, transportation problem) equal to the number of academic workdays lost. Unless a specific exception is granted, written work must be submitted in hard copy. Please restrict the use of laptops and other portable electronic devices during class period to course-related activities. Your registration in this class implies that you will follow the university’s policies for maintaining academic integrity, as outlined in Section 4 of the Rights and Responsibilities document. I will email the class at the end of each week with details about reading assignments and due dates for the following week.

READINGS: The readings are all available on LATTE. There are no required textbooks.

SPECIAL NOTE: If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis
University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.

Unit 1: Encountering the Other


Unit 2: Travelers in the Ancient World

*Lecture I: From the Known to the Unknown World in Earlier Times*

Sally Hovey Wriggins, *Xuanzang: A Buddhist Pilgrim on the Silk Road*, 75-89.

Unit 3: Marvels along the Silk Road

*Lecture II: Frontiers of Faiths in the Middle Ages*  
*Film: “Marco Polo”*

Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, Book Two [selections].

Unit 4: Pilgrims and Crusader in the Holy Lands

*Lecture III: Pilgrims and Crusaders in the Holy Lands*  
*Film: “Kingdom of Heaven”*

Francesco Gabrieli, *Arab Historians of the Crusades* [‘Izz ad-Din Ibn al-Athīr and Bahā’ ad-Din Ibn Shaddād], 139-201.
Unit 5: Convivencia in Medieval Spain

*Film:* “Cities of Light”

Olivia Remie Constable, ed., *Medieval Iberia: Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources* [selections].
Maria Menocal, “A Brief History of a First-Rate Place,” *The Ornament of the World*, 17-49.

Unit 6: Brave New Worlds in the Age of Discovery

*Lecture IV: Cartography and Cognition: Mapping the New World from the Old*

Christopher Columbus, *The Diario of Christopher Columbus’s First Voyage to America 1492-1493* (ed. O. Dunn and J. E. Kelley, Jr.) [selections].
Anthony Pagden, “The Principle of Attachment,” *European Encounters with the New World*, 17-24 [only].

Unit 7: Alternative Visions of Conquest

*Lecture V: A World Turned Upside Down: The Inca Experience of the Spanish Conquest*

Miguel Leon-Portilla, *The Broken Spears*, 127-44.

Unit 8: New World Encounters in Jamestown

*Film:* “The New World”

Ralphe Hamor, “True Discourse of the Present Estate of Virginia.”
John Rolfe, Letter of John Rolfe to Sir Thomas Dale, 1614.

Unit 9: The American Frontier as a Middle Ground

*Lecture VI: The “Civilizing Mission”: Colonization and Conversion in North America*
*Film: “After the First Thanksgiving”*
*Film: “Lewis and Clark”*

Gary E. Mouton, ed., *The Definitive Journals of Lewis & Clark*, vol. 6: Down the Columbia to Fort Clatsop, 79-98, 162-73

Unit 10: First Contact in Oceania

*Lecture VII: Appropriating the Other in the Pacific*
*Film: “First Contact”*


Unit 11: Slave Societies in the New World

Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings* (ed. V. Caretta), 53-68, 107-12.
Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “Between Big House and Slave Community,” *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South*, 146-91.

Unit 12: Colonized and Colonizers: India during the Raj

Lecture VIII: Alternative Hierarchies in Imperial India

Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and Lloyd I. Rudolph, *Reversing the Gaze: Amar Singh’s Diary: A Colonial Subject’s Narrative of Imperial India* [selections].

**ESSAY ASSIGNMENTS:**

**First Essay Assignment:** Do you see evidence in the *primary texts* from Units 1-3 of “orientalism,” as defined by Edward Said? Do you think that any of the “modes of cross-cultural understanding” mentioned by Dallmayr would be more accurate labels for attitudes toward “Asia” in the European travelers we have been reading (i.e., Odysseus, Herodotus, Odoric, William, Marco Polo, and Matthew Ricci)? Your essay should be about six double-spaced pages. You should include brief citations if you quote passages from the primary texts.

**Second Essay Assignment:** Based on the *primary texts* in Units 4-7, as well as on the lectures, readings, and discussions so far in the course, why do you think that that tolerance and dialogue are so difficult to establish and maintain in cross-cultural encounters that foreground religious institutions, beliefs, and practices? Do you see any evidence for the claim that less rather than more understanding across religious boundaries would increase tolerance? Your essay should be about six double-spaced pages. You should include brief citations if you include quotations from the *primary texts*.

**Third Essay Assignment:** In Units 8-12 we explore cases where crossing cultural boundaries is momentary and transient (temporary trading outposts, Lewis and Clark, explorers in the Pacific, etc.) and also cases where different cultures live together in more permanent or settled contact (border communities, slave plantations, colonial societies). Write an essay comparing these two modalities of cross-cultural contact. Do you see in these different kinds of situations any systematic variations in the ways that people interact with each other and develop (or don’t develop) understanding? You should include brief citations if you include quotations from the *primary texts*. For this assignment graduate students are expected to utilize at least three sources beyond those on the syllabus; a selection of relevant supplementary readings is provided on LATTE, and the instructor is happy to provide additional suggestions.