The Australian Experience

Class code
SCA-UA 9809 – 001

Instructor Details
Dr. Toby Martin
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Consultations by Appointment
Please allow at least 24 hours for your instructor to respond to your emails.

Class Details
Spring 2015

The Australian Experience

Thursday, 3:00 – 6:00pm
February 5 to May 14
Room 302
NYU Sydney Academic Centre

Prerequisites
None

Class Description
This course offers a wide-ranging critique of Australian culture and society. It aims to interrogate Australian society with a methodology that draws on critical race theory, feminism, social geography and cultural studies. It will look at issues such as the relationship between Australian settler culture and Aboriginal Australians; Australia’s experience of migration and multiculturalism; Australians’ relationship with their environment; and Australians’ sense of national identity. In particular, it will consider how these issues have played out in popular culture.

This course offers a special experience for students wishing to broaden and deepen their methodologies of cultural analysis. Australian society is fascinating in itself, but it also offers a unique perspective on transnational issues such as identity formation, social justice movements and the experience of multiculturalism. For instance, given Australia’s history of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations, the issue of race in a post-colonial context is particularly acute here. Through comparison with the Australian experience, students will develop a more critical view of American and global society. Students wishing to pursue a career that involves cultural analysis will benefit greatly from studying Australian society, in Australia, and thus developing this comparative approach.
This course has three interweaving themes of study: race, class and gender. This course will look at how these issues have played out in various facets of Australian culture, i.e.: attitudes to the landscape; representations of crime; humour; and art. The course is bookended by sessions that consider place-making in Australia: an introductory session that looks at exploration and mapping, and a concluding session that looks at popular music and geographies of place.

**Desired Outcomes**

Students will be expected to develop:

- A critical understanding of Australian culture and society.
- An Australian perspective on the politics of race, class and gender in a postcolonial context.
- An understanding of the ways in which issues in Australian society are both local and transnational.
- Critical comparisons between Australia and America.
- A comparative approach to cultural analysis
- An ability to undertake nuanced readings of primary source material – especially popular culture.

**Assessment Components**

Primary source presentation (15%), 10-15 mins
Follow-up paper (15%), 3 pages
Short essay (30%), 5 pages
Long Essay (40%), 12 pages

15% Primary source presentation. (15 mins)
Each student will be asked to make one 15 minute presentation.
For this presentation, students will be asked to locate a primary source (i.e. a newspaper article, artwork, photograph or a song) that relates to the week’s topic, briefly describe it and its context, and critically evaluate it. Students will be expected to explain to the class how their chosen source helps to illuminate the attitudes of Australians. In doing so, the presentation should make connections between the required readings for the week and the primary source. Students will be expected to demonstrate a keen understanding of the relevant issue, and the required reading.

15% Follow-up paper (3 pages)
A write-up of your presentation is due the week following your presentation. This paper should turn your presentation into an essay-style argument, showing how the primary source illuminates attitudes in Australian culture. Students will need to refer to and demonstrate a keen knowledge of all the required readings and one of the additional readings from the relevant week in this essay.

30% Short essay (5 pages)
Due in-class, Week 7. Refer to at least three of the required readings in answering this
question.

What is the ‘bush myth’? What are its limitations?

40% Long Essay (12 pages)
Choice of questions TBA. Due 5pm Monday 18 May during Exam Week
Students need to refer to at least six scholarly sources in writing this essay, at least four of which need to be required or additional readings from this course.

Failure to submit or fulfill any required course component will result in failure of the class.

Assessment Expectations

Grade A: Excellent performance showing a thorough knowledge and understanding of the topics of the course; all work includes clear, logical explanations, insight, and original thought and reasoning.

Grade B: Good performance with general knowledge and understanding of the topics; all work includes general analysis and coherent explanations showing some independent reasoning, reading and research.

Grade C: Satisfactory performance with some broad explanation and reasoning; the work will typically demonstrate an understanding of the course on a basic level.

Grade D: Passable performance showing a general and superficial understanding of the course’s topics; work lacks satisfactory insight, analysis or reasoned explanations.

Grade F: Unsatisfactory performance in all assessed criteria. Work is weak, unfinished or unsubmitted.

Grade Conversions

This course uses the following scale of numerical equivalents to letter grades:

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\begin{align*}
A &= \text{94-100} \\
A- &= \text{90-93} \\
B+ &= \text{87-89} \\
B &= \text{84-86} \\
B- &= \text{80-83} \\
C+ &= \text{77-79} \\
C &= \text{74-76} \\
C- &= \text{70-73} \\
D+ &= \text{67-69} \\
D &= \text{65-66} \\
F &= \text{below 65}
\end{align*}
\]

Late Submission of Work

Written work due in class must be submitted to your instructor during class time.

Late work should be submitted in person to the Academic Coordinator during regular office hours (9:00am-5:00pm, Monday-Friday). In the absence of the Academic Coordinator, another member of the administrative staff can accept the work in person. The NYUS staff
will mark down the date and time of submission in the presence of the student. Students must also submit an electronic copy of late written work to Turn-It-In within 24 hours.

Work submitted after the submission time without an agreed extension receives a penalty of 2 points on the 100-point scale (for the assignment) for each day the work is late.

Written work submitted beyond five (5) weekdays after the submission date without an agreed extension fails and is given a zero.

**Plagiarism Policy**

The academic standards of New York University apply to all coursework at NYU Sydney. NYU Sydney policies are in accordance with New York University’s plagiarism policy. The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.

Penalties for confirmed cases of plagiarism are severe and are dealt with by the Director, NYU Sydney, not your instructor. Your home school will be notified and you will be dealt with according to the standards of that school. The codes of conduct and academic standards for NYU’s various schools and colleges are outlined in the respective school’s academic resources.

**Attendance Policy**

Study abroad at Global Academic Centres is an academically intensive and immersive experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. **To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centres is mandatory, and unexcused absences will be penalised with a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade for every week of classes missed.**

The class roster will be marked in the first five minutes of class and anyone who arrives after this time will be considered absent. Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. Repeated absences will result in harsher penalties, including failure.

**Classroom Expectations**

This is a seminar subject and requires the active participation of all students. It also requires engaged discussion, including listening to and respecting other points of view. Your behaviour in class should respect your classmates’ desire to learn. It is important for you to focus your full attention on the class, for the entire class period.

- Arrive to class on time.
- Once you are in class, you are expected to stay until class ends. Leaving to make or take phone calls, to meet with classmates, or to go to an interview, is not acceptable behaviour.
- Phones, digital music players, and any other communications or sound devices are
not to be used during class. That means no phone calls, no texting, no social media, no email, and no internet browsing at any time during class.

- Laptop computers and tablets are not to be used during class except in rare instances for specific class-related activity expressly approved by your instructor.
- The only material you should be reading in class is material assigned for that class. Reading anything else, such as newspapers or magazines, or doing work from another class, is not acceptable.
- Class may not be recorded in any fashion – audio, video, or otherwise – without permission in writing from the instructor.

**Required Texts**


**Supplemental Texts (Available in NYUS Library)**

- Bain Attwood, *Telling the Truth about Aboriginal History*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2005
- Bain Attwood, *In the Age of Mabo: History, Aborigines and Australia*, Sydney, 1996
- Fran De Groen and Peter Kirkpatrick (eds), *Serious Frolic: Essays on Australian Humour*, UQP, Brisbane, 2009
Session 1 ‘The Workers’ Paradise’: The myth of the egalitarian nation

Thursday 5 February

One of the most pervasive myths of Australian identity is that of egalitarianism. This week we will look at the importance of classlessness in Australian society, and the corresponding romanticisation of the working-class, from the ‘bush myth’ of the late 19th century, to the 21st century campaign by the mining industry to create and protect jobs for ‘ordinary’ Australians. We will also look at popular images of this Australian stereotype: from the Drover, to Crocodile Dundee, to the lifesaver, to the digger.

Required Reading:

Recommended Reading:

### Session 2   Encounters: Indigenous and non-Indigenous contact, conflict and exchange

**Thursday 12 February**

This week we will look at how encounters between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians have shaped contemporary Australian society, with an emphasis on the Sydney experience. We will look at past conflict and warfare, as well as recent attempts at ‘reconciliation’ of history: from the apology (and march across the Sydney Harbour Bridge); to the 2000 Olympics; to proposed changes to the Australian constitution; to tourist interest in Aboriginal culture and art.

**Required Reading:**

**Recommended Reading:**

### Session 3   Survival: the struggle for Indigenous rights and culture

**Thursday 19 February**

This week we will look at the ways in which Indigenous Australians have fought for their cultural survival. In particular, we will look at political strategies employed for rights and justice in the latter part of the 20th century and early 21st century. We will look at the creative expression of Aboriginal rights through art, particularly music.

**Required Reading:**
**Recommended Reading:**


**Required Field Trip:** Walking tour of La Perouse with Uncle Vic Simms

**Session 4  White Australia: migration and Australian identity**

**Thursday 26 February**

**Guest Lecturer:** Mohammed Ahamad

Race – especially whiteness – has become a key part of Australian identity. This week we will look at attempts to keep Australia white: from responses to Chinese goldminers in the 1850s; to the ‘White Australia Policy’; to the treatment of Aboriginal people; to the rhetoric of right-wing politicians in the late 20th century; to the ‘Cronulla Riots’ of 2005; to current treatment of refugees.

**Required Reading:**


**Recommended Reading:**


**Session 5  Home-building: the experiences of ‘new Australians’**

**Thursday 5 March**

More recently, the hegemony of White Australia has been challenged by a rival myth: that of multicultural Australia. This week we will look at the waves of non-British migration that have taken place throughout the twentieth century: from southern Europeans in the 1950s; to Vietnamese in the 1970s; to Lebanese in the 1980s and 90s. We will consider the migrant experience through cultural expression such as food, language and religious belief and the degree to which people can create homes away from home.

**Required Reading:**


**Recommended Reading:**
Field Trip: Bankstown. Walking tour or self-guided research trip followed by discussion.

Session 6  Man’s Country: feminism, misogyny and Australian society
Thursday 12 March

This week we will consider the contribution of feminism to Australian culture. In particular we will looks at the ways in which feminist scholarship has challenged some of the cherished myths of the Australian self-image. First-wave feminism of the early twentieth century is sometimes characterised as the effort to get men out of the pubs and into the home; second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 70s is sometimes characterised as the effort to get women out of the home and into the pubs. Consequently we will consider the contribution of feminism via an analysis of drinking cultures. We will also examine the treatment of Australia’s first woman prime minister: Julia Gillard.

Required Reading:

Recommended Reading:
- Tanja Luckins, ‘Pigs, hogs and Aussie blokes: the emergence of the term ‘six o’clock swill’, History Australia, 4:1, June 2007, 8.1-08.17

SPRING BREAK 16-20 March

Session 7  The Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras and a Queer History of Sydney
Thursday 26 March

With the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras in full-swing this month we will take some time to consider this event’s significance, both as an expression of rights, but also as an expression of Sydney’s identity. We will also look at the homosexual past of Sydney.

Required Reading:
- Robert French, Camping By A Billabong, selected chapter TBC 30 pages max
**Recommended Reading:**

**Field Trip:** Walking tour of Darlinghurst and Kings Cross with Robert French

**Session 8  Sex: Conceptualising Sexual Relationships and the Gay Liberation Movement**

**Thursday 2 April**

**Guest lecturer:** Fadia Abboud

Despite high-court rulings to the contrary and despite the fact that 75% of Australians support it, same-sex marriage is not legal in Australia. 2015 may be the year in which this changes. Or it may not be. This is one of the most emotionally charged issues in Australian life at the moment. This week we will look at why it has become such a vital issue recently, and why Australia seems to be lagging behind the rest of the western world in this issue. We will also take this opportunity to look at sex and sexuality in Australian culture more broadly. We will also look at the difficulties faced by young gay and lesbian Australians in country towns or within fundamentalist religious cultures

**Required Reading:**

**Recommended Reading:**

**Session 9  The Bush: The Centrality of Rural Areas in the Australian Imaginary**

**Thursday 9 April**

This week will look at the place which most Australians don’t live, but which are nevertheless very important to them: the bush. We will look at Aboriginal custodianship and landcare, environmental degradation wrought by the pastoral and agricultural industries (with a focus on Western NSW), national parks, concepts of 'wilderness', natural disasters such as bushfires and drought, and the rise of the Green movement. We will also consider how pro-development rhetoric often employs the language of class.

**Required Reading:**
- Bill Gammage, ‘Curious Landscapes’, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines made Australia*,
Session 13  The Beach
Thursday 16 April

This week we will look at the near-mythic importance of the beach to many Australians, especially as a place for leisure and holidays. We will look at the development of beach culture in the early twentieth century, i.e. surfing, ocean swimming and coastal holidays. We will consider the Australian beach as a gendered space.

Required Reading:

Recommended Reading:

Session 11  The Suburbs and the home
Thursday 23 April

This week will look at the place where most Australians live, yet haven’t mythologised to the same degree as the beach and the bush: the suburbs. We will ask why it has been popular to knock the suburbs, especially in comedy. We will also look at Australian house design and architecture in general.

Required Reading:
- Hirst, ‘Suburban Nation’, pp 74-86.
- Robin Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness*, Chapter TBA

Session 12  ‘Taking the Piss’: Humour and the Anti-establishment Impulse
Thursday 30 April

Australians pride themselves on their sense of humour. But what exactly do Australians laugh at? And is it any different from any other country? We will look at humour in television and film and in everyday Australian life. We will also look at Australians’ use of language, especially colloquialisms. We will also consider whether humour in Australia functions as inclusionary or exclusionary.

Required Reading:

Recommended Reading:
- Afferbeck Lauder, Strine, Text, Melbourne, 2012, pp 10-44

Session 13  Crime: The Role of the Criminal ‘Larrikin’ in Australian Society

Thursday 7 May

Guest Lecturer: Peter Doyle

Many Australian folk heroes (or anti-heroes) are violent criminals – from convicts to bushrangers to ‘larrikins’ to famous figures of organised crime – and real-crime television shows such as Underbelly attracts large audiences. Something in criminals’ mythic sense of lack of deference to authority seems to appeal to Australians’ self-image. This week we will look at some notable examples of criminals in Australia’s history and consider the paradox that, despite the celebration of violent anti-authoritarianism, history shows Australians to be obedient and law-abiding.

Required Reading:
- Melissa Bellanta, Chapter 1, Larrikins, UQP Press, Brisbane, 2012, pp xi-xxii & 181-191
- Peter Doyle, ‘Killing, Being Killed’ in Crooks Like Us, Historic Houses Trust, 227-247

Recommended Reading:

Session 14  ‘Wide Open Road’: Conceptualising Place in Australia Through Song

Thursday 14 May

To wrap-up the course we will consider the role music has played in imagining Australia. Music is one of
the most accessible representations of attitudes in society. Popular, succinct and emotionally-charged, it offers a scholar of culture a rich primary source. This week will look at how different musical genres - such as hip-hop, country, rock and Aboriginal ‘fusion’ music - have expressed feelings of what it means to live in Australia. We will be particularly looking for musical examples that communicate a strong sense of place. We will also be looking at debates of cultural distinctiveness vs globalisation that often seem to surround popular music in Australia.

**Required Reading:**

**Recommended Reading:**

**Your Instructor**

Dr. Toby Martin is an historian and musician. Since finishing his PhD at the University of Sydney in 2011 he has pursued a research interest in histories of music, tourism, and the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. He has published several articles and his first monograph – *Yodelling Boundary Riders: Country Music in Australia* – will be published in 2015. Toby was the 2011 ‘Folk Fellow’ at the National Library of Australia where he researched the music of Dougie Young and other Indigenous songwriters from western New South Wales, and formed a band with Young's grandson to perform these songs. Toby is currently the David Scott Mitchell Fellow at the State Library of NSW where he is researching tourism to Aboriginal communities, 1880s-1950s, and, after many years playing in the rock band Youth Group, he has recently released a solo album called *Love's Shadow*. 