Geography of the United States
Geography 301.XXX
Spring 2014

TR 9:35-10:50
ILSB 1105

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OFFICE HOURS: TUESDAYS AND THURSDAYS
3:00-4:00; WEDNESDAYS 9:00-10:00

Geography begins with the observation that the surface of the earth is not uniform, but rather varies from place to place. Geographers describe these variations as the shape of the land. When they say shape of the land, they mean both its visible appearance—the buildings, fields, forests that anyone can see—and its organization as a system of routes (e.g. roads), regions, and places (e.g. towns). Geographers call the first aspect of shape a landscape, the second aspect a spatial systems.

Geographers are interested not only in the shape of the land, but also in the shaping of land by various processes. They therefore seek to understand the processes that produce landscapes and spatial systems. These processes may be natural, economic, cultural, political, or demographic. Most landscapes and spatial systems are produced by several interacting processes.

Because geographers are concerned with shaping processes, they study geographic change. The landscapes and spatial systems that you and I inhabit developed out of earlier landscapes and spatial systems, and they are developing into landscapes and spatial systems quite different from those we know. To understand geographic change and development, geographers study the landscapes and spatial systems of the past. These studies are called historical geography.

In this course we will study the shape and shaping of the geography of the United States. I will describe the landscapes and spatial systems of its major sub-regions (e.g. New England, the Lowland South, the Great Plains) and explain how they were produced by natural and human processes. Our aim is to understand the geography of the contemporary United States, but to do this we will normally investigate the origins of present patterns in the historical geography.

Students who complete this course will not only have a better understanding of where things are, but also of why they are where they are and how the United States came to be put together in the way that it is. They will be able to explain the map of the country, not just find places on it.

Landscape: Downtown Sacramento, Ca, c. 1945
**Learning Objectives**

1) Students will be able to identify the significant geographic features and patterns of the United States, as indicated on a variety of contemporary and historic maps.

2) Students will be able to explain the causes and consequences of these features and patterns in terms of economic, cultural, and political processes.

3) Students will be able to interpret the cultural significance of selected landscapes and landscape representations.

4) Students will be able to delineate the culture regions of the United States and describe their origin and character.

**Course Description**

This is a lecture course, supplemented by readings from one textbook. Sixteen of the lectures cover major regions of the United States. Nine additional lectures, interspersed among these, treat topics in the geography of the US, such as the site and situation of some major cities, the geographic consequences of the Civil War, geopolitics, national identity, and future geographies. Lecture titles are given in the schedule below.

These lectures will necessarily describe the locations of many geographical features, such as cities, rivers, and mountain ranges, and you are expected to have a reasonably good grasp of the locations of major features by the end of the course (beginning the course with this knowledge is an advantage, but not a requirement). Every lecture will, however, go beyond mere location to explain the historical origins or present significance of these features. You will also master this interpretive material.

**Textbook and Material**


Ten 3X5 index cards.

Study guides for each lecture will be posted on e-learning. These include maps and annotated lists of important geographic features and concepts.

**Evaluation and Grades**

Your final grade will be based on three examinations and ten quizzes. The exams are weighted equally and the third exam is not cumulative. The dates of the exams are given on the course schedule. Tests will consist of multiple choice, true-false, and mapping questions.

The quizzes will not be announced beforehand, as they are meant to encourage and reward regular attendance. Each quiz will cover material from the previous lecture. Each quiz is be worth ten points, and will consist of a multiple choice question worth two points and three true-false choice questions worth one point each. You will be awarded five points simply for submitting a quiz, regardless of your answers.
Region: Economic and cultural regions of the United States
Grade Scaling

The top score on each exam will be increased to 100, and the same increase will be added to every other exam. For instance, if the top score is 95, five points will be added to every exam in the class. The normal letter grade cut-offs will be: A-90, B-80, C-70, D-50. After the final exam I may choose to lower one or more of these cut-offs. If I do, the best students (e.g. high 80s) will be rewarded first.

In a class of this size some students will inevitably end up with final scores that are just below the cutoff for the next highest letter grade. Nothing can be done about this. If you find yourself in this position, please console yourself with the thought that, over the course of your college career, you will also at times find yourself just above the cutoff for a letter grade. The grade that is just below the cutoff is no less unfair than the grade that is just above the cutoff.

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend every class session. Remember, each lecture contains about four percent of the total lecture material. Even if you get notes from another student, your final grade will likely drop by about two percent every time you miss class! I will not call roll in class; however, the ten unannounced quizzes serve as a proxy measure of attendance. Missing a quiz without a university-approved excuse will drop your final grade by 2.5 percent!

If you miss an exam for one of the reasons accepted by the university (see the university web site for a list of “university-approved excuses”), you may be allowed to take a make-up. However, to do so you must: (1) Notify me, in advance, of your pending absence (an acknowledged e-mail

will suffice). Truly incapacitated students are excepted. (2) Provided me with documents.

If you miss a quiz and have a documented university-approved excuse, you will be allowed to take a make-up quiz. No more than two make-up quizzes will be allowed. These requirements conform to university policy.

What You Must Do To Succeed

Success for the average student requires time and effort. How much time is enough? You should spend two hours outside class for every hour you spend in class—that is five to ten hours per week. It’s not only how much time you spend, but how you spend it. For every student who fails due to having spent too little time and effort, there is another who fails due to having spent lots of time and effort unwisely. Here are some pointers:

1) Come to class. This means every class, not most of them. Pay attention in class. Think about the lecture, not about the test. Keep your mind engaged by repeatedly asking yourself, what are we talking about? Why are we talking about this?
2) Make useful notes. Normally this will mean rough notes in class, finished notes as soon as possible after. Rough notes should contain only information that you cannot keep in short-term memory, such as facts, names, technical terms and definitions. Finished notes are a useful, legible, complete record for later reference and study. Much of the information in this class is best noted on a map. Print out the maps on the e-learning site and bring them to class.

3) Read your book. I suggest that you skim assigned material before class, and then read it again more slowly after class. Make note of information that supports or amplifies the lecture. Avoid mindless underlining.

4) Study the maps. Your textbook includes excellent maps. Take time to study these, and if possible compare them with maps in an atlas or on the Web. If you do not own an atlas, you may wish to purchase one, or use those in the Map Room of the Evans library. Notice the shape of the land, the locations of places and the relations between them, the patterns of rivers and transportation routes. Ask yourself questions!

5) Ask questions. Ask me the question as soon as you realize that you do not understand. Do not hope that your misunderstanding will go away.

Course Schedule

**Week 1**

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<tr>
<th>T</th>
<th>1/15 Introduction to the course and regional geography</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>1/17 TOPICAL LECTURE 1: Site, Situation, and the Development of New York City (Read Hudson, Preface)</td>
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**Week 2**

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<tr>
<th>T</th>
<th>1/22 REGION 1: New England (Read Hudson, Chapter 4)</th>
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<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>1/24 REGION 2: New York State (Read Hudson, Chapter 5)</td>
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**Week 3**

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<tr>
<th>T</th>
<th>1/29 REGION 3: Great Lakes (Read Hudson, Chapters 14 and 22)</th>
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<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>1/31 TOPICAL LECTURE 2: American Settlement Types</td>
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**Week 4**

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<tr>
<th>T</th>
<th>2/5 REGION 4: Middle Atlantic and Manufacturing Core (Read Hudson, Chapter 6)</th>
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<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>2/7 REGION 5: Midwest (Read Hudson, Chapter 13)</td>
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**Week 5**

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<th>T</th>
<th>2/12 TOPICAL LECTURE 3: Washington D.C. as a Symbolic Landscape</th>
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<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>2/14 EXAM 1</td>
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Processes: Transportation and Urbanization.
Week 6
T 2/19 REGION 6: Upland South (Read Hudson, Chapters 7, 8, and 9)
R 2/21 REGION 7: Lowland South (Read Hudson, Chapters 10)

Week 7
T 2/26 REGION 8: The Gulf Coast (Read Hudson, Chapter 12)
R 2/28 TOPICAL LECTURE 4: Geographic Causes, Conduct, and Consequences of the Civil War

Week 8
T 3/5 REGION 9: Florida (Read Hudson, Chapter 11)
R 3/7 REGION 10: Texas (Read Hudson, Chapter 15)

Week 9
T 3/12 SPRING BREAK
R 3/14 SPRING BREAK

Week 10
T 3/19 REGION 11: Great Plains (Read Hudson, Chapters 16 and 18)
R 3/21 REGION 12: Rocky Mountains (Read Hudson, Chapters 17 and 19)

Week 11
T 3/26 REGION 13: Great Basin (Read Hudson, Chapters 19 and 20)
R 3/28 EXAM 2

Week 12
T 4/2 TOPICAL LECTURE 5: American Culture? American Cultures?
R 4/4 REGION 14: Southwest (Read Hudson, Chapter 21)

Week 13
T 4/9 TOPICAL LECTURE 6: Some Counterfactual Geographies of the United States
R 4/11 REGION 15: Pacific Northwest (Read Hudson, Chapter 25)

Week 14
T 4/16 REGION 16: California (Read Hudson, Chapter 26)
R 4/18 TOPICAL LECTURE 7: Los Angeles, Yesterday's City of Tomorrow

Week 15
T 4/23 TOPICAL LECTURE 8: The United States and the World (Read Hudson, Chapter 27)
R 4/25 TOPICAL LECTURE 9: Some Future Possibilities

Exam Week
F 5/5 Third Exam 12:30-2:30 p.m.

Classroom Conduct
Students are not allowed to read newspapers in class, or to use electronic devices such as cell phones, gaming devices, or MP3 players. This ban includes sending and receiving text messages. Violators will be asked to leave the classroom. Laptop computers may be used for note taking only.

Aggie Honor Code
“An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal, or tolerate those who do.”

Legal Statement
This course will be conducted in compliance with all applicable federal and state laws, including but not limited to The Americans with Disabilities Act. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the Department of Student Life, Services for Students with Disabilities in Room R118 of Cain Hall. The phone number is 845-1637.

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