

STUDIES IN FOLKLORE & FOLKLIFE
 ENG 5600 001 CRN: 16697
 6-9 p.m. M
 1171 Main
 Fall, 2008

Instructor: Dr. Janet L. Langlois
 Office: 5057 Woodward Ave., #9305.4
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Course Description

Folklore & Folklife studies have examined traditional cultural practices (oral, customary and material) for over one hundred years in the United States, so have much to offer and to learn from current analyses of popular culture and everyday life within the broader arena of literary and cultural studies. This term we will focus on interdisciplinary critical approaches toward contemporary legends and rumors, with a special emphasis on their social, political, and global contexts past and present. Anthropologists, cultural studies specialists, folklorists, psychologists, sociologists, literary writers and critics as well as web masters and users, bloggers, film makers, journalists and more have all had something to say about these interrelated genres. Our goal this term will be to examine case studies, the critical literature, and our own field research to assess emergent issues and relevance to contemporary life.

Texts

Available at Marwil's Bookstore (southeast corner of Warren and Cass Avenues), on line for purchase, and on three-hour reserve at the David Adamany Undergraduate Library.

Brunvand, Jan Harold. *Encyclopedia of Urban Legends*. NY: W.W. Norton, 2001.

Fine, Gary Alan, Véronique Campion-Vincent, Chip Heath, eds. *Rumor Mills: The Social Impact of*

Rumor and Legend. New Brunswick, NJ: AldineTransaction, 2005.

Goldstein, Diane E. *Once Upon a Virus: AIDS Legends and Vernacular Risk Perception*. Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 2004.

Additional Readings

Additional course readings, primarily journal articles and book chapters, can be accessed through ERes (Electronic Reserves) and/ or Blackboard as noted on the syllabus or in class sessions.

Film Clips

Occasional film clips will be shown and analyzed within the critical discussions for that class period.

Blackboard-Assisted Course

Please check the Blackboard website for this course regularly as I will post additional readings, announcements, class information, assignments, exam review summaries and website links, etc. Students will be using the Discussion Board as part of class participation work. To access Blackboard and to communicate by email, you will need to activate your WSU Access ID at <http://computing.wayne.edu/accessid/activate.php>. You should do this even if you have another email address. If you do use another email address, you should have email that is sent to your WSU account forwarded to you by going to <http://computing.wayne.edu/email/forwarding.php>.

Course Requirements

Course format will be a combination of lecture, discussion and group ethnography. Requirements include midterm and final essay exams (40%), term projects (45%) and class participation (attendance, discussion, brief oral reports of term projects) (15%). Fuller guidelines are forthcoming in separate handouts.

Working Syllabus9/08 **Introduction**9/15 **Overture: Rumors, Legends & Academic Life**

Readings: Brunvand, *Encyclopedia of Urban Legends*, browse entries of choice but include preface, introduction, academe, legends of, analysis and interpretation, definition of "legend," France, Internet, performance of urban legends, rumor, variants and versions; Fine, "Rumor Matters: An Introductory Essay," *Rumor Mills*, pp. 1-7; Lau, Kimberly, "On the Rhetorical Use of Legend: U.C. Berkeley Campus Lore as a Strategy for Coded Protest." *Contemporary Legend*. New Series 1. (1998):1-20 (Blackboard).

Guidelines for discussion, assignments #1 and #2 distributed9/22 **First Movement (Allegro): Rumor, Legend & Illness Narratives (AIDS)**

Readings: Brunvand, "AIDS Mary," "AIDS Harry," "Needle-Attack Legends"; Goldstein, *Once Upon a Virus*, introduction and chapters 1-4, pp. xiii-xvi, 1-99; Yankah, Kwesi, "Narrative in Times of Crisis: AIDS Stories in Ghana." *Journal of Folklore Research* 41: 2/3 (May-August 2004): 181-199 (Blackboard).

9/29

Readings: Brunvand, classifying urban legends, collecting urban legends, comparative approach; Goldstein, *Once Upon a Virus*, chapters, 5-8, pp. 100-177; Bennett, Gillian, "AIDS Aggressors: Mirrors, Caskets, and Needles" in her *Bodies: Sex, Violence, Disease, and Death in Contemporary Legends*. (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2005), pp. 104-141.

Small-group work10/6 **Second Movement (Scherzo): Rumor, Legend & Social Conflict**

Readings: Brunvand, culture-clash legends, racism in urban legends, sociological approach; Fine, Part I, *The Social Production of Conflict and Prejudice*, pp. 15-80; Mayor, Adrienne, "The Nessus Shirt in the New World: Smallpox Blankets in History and Legend." *Journal of American Folklore* 108:427 (Winter 1995): 54-77 (Blackboard).

Small-group work

10/13

Readings: Brunvand, historical approach, the kidney heist, international urban legends, organ thefts; Fine, *Rumor Mills*, Part II, *The Spread of Rumors*, pp. 81-165; Campion-Vincent, Véronique, "Organ Theft Narratives in the Early 2000s," in her *Organ Theft Legends* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2005), pp. 193-97 (eReserves/Blackboard)

Small-group work

10/20

Readings: Brunvand, *The Blood Libel*, Chinese Restaurants, Church's Chicken Rumors; Maskiell, Michelle and Adrienne Mayor, "Killer Khilats, Part I: Legends of Poisoned 'Robes of Honour' in India." *Folklore* 112:1 (April 2001): 23-45 (Blackboard).

Langlois, Janet L., "'The Belle Isle Bridge Incident': Legend Dialectic and Semiotic System in the 1943 Detroit Race Riots." *Journal of American Folklore* 96:380 (April-June, 1983):183-99; Langlois, Janet L., "'Celebrating Arabs': Tracing Legends and Rumor Labyrinths in Post-9/11 Detroit." *Journal of American Folklore* 118: 468 (Spring 2005): 219-236.

Midterm Review

10/27

MIDTERM EXAM

11/3

Readings: Fine, *Rumor Mills*, Part III, The Creation of Plausibility, pp. 169-265; Oring, Elliott, "Legendry and the Rhetoric of Truth," *Journal of American Folklore* 121:480 (Spring 2008):127-166 (Blackboard)

Works-in-progress oral reports

11/10 **Third Movement (Andante): Rumor, Legend & the Supernatural**

Readings: Brunvand, belief legend, supernaturalism in urban legends; Dégh, Linda, *Legend and Belief: Dialectics of a Folklore Genre* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2001), pp. 140-53, 362-82 (eReserves/Blackboard) ; Dégh, Linda and Andrew Vázsonyi, "The Crack on the Red Goblet or Truth in Modern Legend" in Dégh, Linda, *Narratives in Society: A Performer-Centered Study of Narration* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1995), pp. 152-70 (eReserves/Blackboard);

Assignment #1 report due.

Works-in-progress oral reports

11/17

Readings: Lindahl, Carl, "Ostensive Healing: Pilgrimage to the San Antonio Ghost Tracks." *Journal of American Folklore* 118:468 (Spring 2005):164-85 (Blackboard). Tucker, Elizabeth, "Ghosts in Mirrors: Reflections of the Self." *Journal of American Folklore* 118:468 (Spring 2005): 186-203 (Blackboard).

Works-in-progress oral reports

11/24

Hufford, David J. "Beings Without Bodies; An Experience-Centered Theory of the Belief in Spirits" in *Out of the Ordinary: Folklore and the Supernatural*, edited by Barbara Walker (Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 1995), pp. 11-45 (E-Book/eReserves/Blackboard); Hammond, Joyce D. "The Tourist Folklore of Pele: Encounters with the Other" in *Out of the Ordinary: Folklore and the Supernatural*, edited by Barbara Walker (Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 1995), pp. 159-79 (E-Book/eReserves/Blackboard).

Works-in-progress oral reports

12/1

Readings: Iwasaka, Michiko and Barre Toelken, "Japanese Death Legends and Vernacular Culture" in their *Ghosts and the Japanese: Cultural Experience in Japanese Death Legends* (Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 1994), pp.50-83, 96-103 (eReserves/Blackboard)

Assignment #2 report due.

Works-in-progress oral reports

12/08 **Finale and Reprise: Conclusions/New Directions**
Final Exam Review
Student Evaluations

12/15 **FINAL**

Contract between Instructor and Students

The instructor asks students to come to class, read and discuss assigned readings, work in small groups on term projects, write project reports without plagiarizing, and have fun in the process. In turn, she agrees to present theoretical and critical concepts, examples and term project guidelines as clearly as possible, to give fair exams, to listen to and encourage various interpretations of material discussed, and to return graded student exams and projects in a timely manner (usually one week later for exams, and no more than two weeks later for ethnographic projects).

Attendance**The English Department attendance policy is as follows:**

Enrolled students in any English classes must attend one of the first two class sessions; otherwise, they may be required to drop the class. The instructor will not add students to the class after the third class session. In addition, the instructor counts attendance as part of the class participation grade (5%), based on % of classes attended. Students are allowed up to 2 **excused** absences that require advance notice to instructor; 3 or more **unexcused** absences, however, will lose attendance points and may constitute withdrawal.

Late Assignments

Students may ask for extension of assignment due date up to a two-day grace period for both assignments. After that time, the paper will receive one-half grade mark down per day late. [Decision on e-mail or drop box acceptance will be determined; office staff will not accept papers at the front desk.]

Paper Format

Reports should be typed, double-spaced, one-inch margins, no larger than 12 pt. type, no binders, paginated. Please don't use binders or plastic folders

Paper Revision

Possible for Assignment #1 only. Further guidelines will be given.

Plagiarism**The College of Liberal Arts Policy on Plagiarism states:**

The principle of honesty is recognized as fundamental to a scholarly community. Students are expected to honor this principle and instructors are expected to take appropriate action when instances of academic dishonesty are discovered. An instructor, on discovering such an instance, may give a failing grade on the assignment or for the course. The instructor has the responsibility of notifying the student of the alleged violation and the action being taken. Both the student and the instructor are entitled to academic due process in all such cases. Acts of dishonesty may lead to suspension or exclusion.

The instructor's policy, on a case-by-case basis, follows the English Department 's guidelines based on college and university guidelines.

Exam Make-ups

Considered if student arranges with instructor before the exam.

Incompletes (REVISED UNIVERSITY POLICY)

The mark of "I" (Incomplete) is given to either an undergraduate or a graduate student when he/she has not completed all of the course work as required for the term and when there is, in the judgment of the instructor, a reasonable probability that the student can complete the course successfully without again attending regular class sessions. The student should be passing at the time the grade of "I" is given. A written contract specifying the work to be completed should be signed by the student and instructor and filed with the English Department. Students receiving incompletes must finish their assignments by the end of a year or the grade will be replaced by an "F." The University will not allow any extensions past the year's deadline.

Withdrawals (REVISED UNIVERSITY POLICY)

The grade of "WN" replaces the "X" grade and applies to any student who has never attended class, or did not complete any assignments, or did not participate in credit-earning activities by the withdrawal date. If a student decides not to go to class after having received a grade for any component of a course, these grades will be issued only as follows: "WP" (Withdrawal with a passing grade earned to date) or "WF" (Withdrawal with a failing grade earned to date.).

Educational Accessibility Services

If you have a physical or mental impairment that may interfere with your ability to complete successfully the requirements for this course, please contact the Educational Accessibility Services Office in Room 1600 of the David Adamany Undergraduate Library to discuss appropriate accommodations on a confidential basis at 577-1851.