

BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY
USEM 55B
HOW TO TRAVEL

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Class: MW 5:10-6:30
in Olin-Sang 116
Office hours (in Pearlman 207):
MW 3:30-4:30
& by appointment

Travel, both as an ideal and a practice, represents in many ways a clear expression of America's core values. Indeed, conceptions of freedom have long been bound up in representations of new frontiers and the "open road," which frequently take on quasi-religious status as symbols of endless possibility. This ideal resonates strongly as one of pure inclusion – consider the appeal of vacation spots welcoming "all" of us, enticing would-be travelers with promises of "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas," or the somewhat less alluring "Connecticut: Closer Than You Think." But as traveling requires that we leave one local world to visit others, it necessitates the drawing of boundaries that define and separate insiders from outsiders. A serious consideration of travel, then, requires that we think about what it means to be part of a community, as well as how we engage with and come to understand communities other than our own. As all of us are regularly involved in one side or the other of these negotiations – if nothing else, you all are mutually making your way as new members of the "Brandeis community" – this class will draw on our first-hand experiences with travel. It will also make use of novels, stories, historical essays, recipes, brochures, photos, maps, statistics, websites, films, music, field trips, and more to understand "how we travel."

Office Hours

I have scheduled office hours on Mondays and Wednesdays from 3:30-4:30. If these times are not convenient for you, we can make other arrangements – email is generally a good way to contact me, and my phone numbers are listed above. I encourage each of you to come to office hours to discuss problems with the class or any other issues that interest or concern you. I will generally be available for quick questions immediately before or after class, and you can also leave messages in my mailbox outside of the Sociology office in Pearlman.

Readings

The following books are required for this course:

Travels With Charley: In Search of America, by John Steinbeck
Mapping Boston, by Alex Krieger and David Cobb, with Amy Turner
Fried Chicken: An American Story, by John T. Edge
Confederacy of Silence, by Richard Rubin

Additional articles and excerpts will also be required and available on our course LATTE page (each of those is referred to as an 'L' reading in the course outline). *Please note that reading assignments should be done by the date listed on the syllabus -- we will generally discuss them during that class period.*

Assignments

Home portrait	15%
Mapping project	20%
Foodways/music scene survey	20%
Final essay	30%
Participation	15%

Home portrait

During the first few weeks of the semester, we will consider how we connect to various places and settings, and how our surroundings shape our sense of who we are. This short (4 page) assignment will allow you to formalize your conceptions of “home,” by elaborating on one or more spaces that have (and/or have not) impacted your present-day identity.

Mapping project

As part of our examination of maps as representations of community, you will construct a map that you see as representing important dimensions of a space you know well. Along with the map itself, you should include an accompanying discussion clarifying the choices that you made throughout the process, addressing why you included particular elements on the map, why you chose to exclude other dimensions, how well you feel that your map represents the community in question, and the limitations of these sorts of physical representations.

Foodways survey

Much of the second half of the semester will be devoted to an examination of local cultures. A central means through which culture is visibly expressed is through food. In class, we will consider the shape of local foodways, through readings, discussions, and direct examination of eating places in Waltham. For this assignment, you will consider these foodways in detail, by analyzing the structure and function of one or more particular venues.

Final essay

This final assignment is intended to integrate the various topics that we emphasize throughout the semester. We will discuss its particular content as the semester proceeds.

Participation

This class is intended to be almost entirely discussion-based; as a matter of principle, we will try to minimize lecturing or other “top-down” behavior. As such, your active participation in each class session is especially important, as our discussions will directly rely on your collective contributions. I expect that each of you will come to class prepared to discuss aspects of readings and other assignments that you found interesting, problematic, confusing, or otherwise significant. To facilitate our discussions, twice during the semester you will be responsible for taking a leadership role in class sessions. This task will require that you pair with another student to formulate a small set of discussion questions (one or both of you should ensure that these are listed on the board at the start of the class meeting), as well as provide a brief overview of your impressions to kick off the broader conversation. Over the next week, you will have a chance to sign up as a discussion leader for two class meetings during the remainder of the semester. Also note that I view participation broadly, meaning that I encourage and value communication *outside* of class (i.e. before or after class meetings, in office hours, or over email) related to questions, ideas, and/or suggestions of possible topics for discussion, connections between class topics and current events or your own experiences, etc. Additionally, we will play music selections tied to

course themes (i.e. about particular places or the idea of travel) on most days immediately before class (between 5:05-5:10) – feel free to participate by suggesting or bringing in interesting songs.

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.

Course outline

Week 1 (3 September): Personal introductions: people and places

Week 2 (8-10 September): Thematic introductions: constructing and leaving home

-**guest speakers:** Brandeis alumni Aaron Kagan, Nicole Karlebach (via Skype), Andrew Slack, Lee Tusman

-**view:** www.brandeis.edu/departments/sociology/bus

-**read:** Michael Powell, "The American Wanderer, in All His Stripes" (available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/24/weekinreview/24powe.html?_r=2&ref=weekinreview&oref=slogin&oref=slogin)

Week 3 (15-17 September): Theoretical and artistic representations of community

-**listen:** Sufjan Stevens, *Illinoise* and NWA, *Straight Outta Compton* (L)

-**read:** J. Macgregor Wise, "Home: Territory and Identity" (L)
Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism* (L)

Weeks 4-6 (22 September - 8 October): Mapping geographic and social spaces

→ **note:** no class 29 September (Brandeis Tuesday) or 1 October (Rosh Hashanah)

-**read:** *Mapping Boston*, Introduction and Chapters 1, 2, 5, and 8

-**view:** Library of Congress "American Memory" Map Collection (available at: <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/gmdhtml/gmdhome.html>)

Home portrait due 9/22

Weeks 7-8 (13-22 October): Engaging with other communities

-**read:** John Steinbeck, *Travels With Charley*

Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (excerpts) (L)

A volume of your choice in the *American Guide* series (part of the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration – most of these are out of print, but can be found in the Brandeis library collection)

Mapping assignment due 10/13

Weeks 9-10 (27 October - 5 November): Culture I: Food and social life

-**read:** John T. Edge, *Fried Chicken: An American Story*

-**view:** www.chowhound.com; www.southernfoodways.com

-**visit:** Waltham restaurants tba

Week 11 (10 & 12 November): Culture II: Music and social life

-**read:** Michael Azerrad, "Beat Happening" (L)

Waltham foodways survey due 11/12

Weeks 12-13 (17-26 November): Difficult interactions I: The legacy of historical divisions

-**watch:** Eyes on the Prize: "Mississippi – Is This America?"

-**read:** Richard Rubin, *Confederacy of Silence* (Part I)

Week 14 (1 & 3 December): Difficult interactions II: Confronting cultural and material divides

-**read:** William Upski Wimsatt, "A Hitchhiker's Guide to Community Organizing" (L)

Week 15 (8 December): Course wrap-up

Final assignment due during finals week