Instructors:
Michael Dove
James Scott
Steven Stoll

Anthropology 541a
History 765a
Political Science 779a
F&ES 753a

Mondays, 1:30-5:20
77 Prospect Street
Room A002

Agrarian Societies:

Culture, Power, History, and Development

This seminar presents a multi-disciplinary perspective on the modern transformation of the countryside of the world. The rise of a capitalist mode of production as the engine of a world economy, the emergence of a contentious international polity of nation-states, and the propagation of rationalizing religions and standardizing education are three distinct yet intersecting processes in the modern transformation of the world since the 1500s. These processes have not been inevitable, irreversible, or complete. However, they have been compelling, in so far as they have come to frame both our acceptance of and resistance to the modern order in which we find ourselves.

“Peasant studies” is a rubric for the loosely bounded, interdisciplinary exploration of the initial modernization of the European countryside and the subsequent engagement and ongoing incorporation of the countryside of Asia, Africa, and the Americas into this modern order. At its most precocious, it tries to comprehend the intrusive thrusts of nation-state formation, capitalist production, and the rationalization of belief into the most distant agrarian regions of the world. At its most instructive, it insists that people everywhere have confronted those forces with their particular histories and distinctive, local configurations of environment, society, and culture. Everywhere, the encounters of old and new ways of viewing the world and organizing activities have been fitful and frightful, always metamorphic, but never uniform. Animating peasant studies has been the concern to demonstrate the varied ways in which peasants have shared in the making of the modern world that has in turn transformed their lives.

We intend this to be an introductory seminar. That is, we assume you may be ignorant of much of the basic literature. We also assume that you work hard and learn fast. Although the varying backgrounds of students and faculty require us to be somewhat eclectic, we hope that the seminar will prove foundational in an interdisciplinary sense for subsequent work on agrarian issues in any discipline. We encourage you, in your writing and discussion, to make vigorous efforts to be
understood across disciplinary boundaries.

Seminar meetings combine lectures and discussions. We expect regular attendance; please notify us in advance if you are unable to come to a session. We regard participation in discussions to be a gauge of students’ completion and comprehension of the assigned readings. We will evaluate your performance in the seminar on the basis of this participation and on the quality and timeliness of the writing assignments.

Beginning in the third week, designated students will be asked to take formal responsibility for organizing the discussion of the readings. Such responsibility will be shared as equitably as possible. As far as writing assignments are concerned, there are two. First, students are required to submit short (3 page) essays on THREE weekly themes/readings of their choice. They may want to link these essays to themes for which they have some responsibility in organizing the discussion.

A second paper is due at the end of the course. This may be either a research paper on a topic related to the course concerns or a theoretical discussion or synthesis of some of the analytical readings we have covered. In either case, it should be negotiated with one of the instructors. A brief proposal (one page) is due in the class on **October 10th** and should be discussed with at least one of the instructors in the following week. The final paper is due (no exceptions) on **December 9th**.

All assigned readings for the seminar are on reserve at the Social Science or Cross Campus Libraries. Copies of all assigned books are available for purchase at **Labyrinth Books**. In addition, we have placed a collection of all assigned articles on file at the office of the Program on Agrarian Studies Office (room C220 at 77 Prospect Street). Students may choose to have a copy of this file made for their purchase and use.

September 5  Week 1  James Scott

**Introduction**

No Reading

September 12  Week 2  Michael Dove

**Agrarian Ethnography: Swidden Agriculture and the Politics of Representation**

Readings:


September 19        Week 3        Steven Stoll and James Scott

**Animal Planet: On the Influence of Animals in Shaping the Rural Landscape**

Readings:


September 26        Week 4        James Scott and Steven Stoll

**Plant Planet: On the Influence of Plants and Seeds in Shaping the Rural Landscape and Homo Sapiens**

Readings:


October 3          Week 5          Michael Dove and James Scott

**The “Bovine Mystique” and Development Discourse**

Reading:

October 10 Week 6 Steven Stoll and James Scott

**Agrarian Capitalism**

Readings:

Allan Kulikoff. 1989. “The Transition to Capitalism in Rural America.” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 46 (January), pp.120-44. [Use the SML ADatabases and Article Searching @ to go to JSTOR.org]


October 17 Week 7 Steven Stoll

**Americans and the Politics of Land in the 19th century**

Readings:


October 24 Week 8 James Scott

**Resistance, Rebellion, and Revolution**

Readings:


October 31 Week 9 Michael Dove

**Cotton Sharecroppers: James Agee and Walker Evans in the U.S. South**

Readings:


November 7 Week 10 Steven Stoll and James Scott

**The Agrarian Depression**

Readings:


Russell Lord. 1938. *To Hold This Soil.* Miscellaneous Publication No. 321, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Chapter 1. (Reading Packet)

November 14 Week 11 Michael Dove

**Rural People, Forests, and Discourses of Deforestation**

Reading:


November 28 Week 12 James Scott

**Intensive, Sustainable, Household Agriculture: A Viable Future**

Readings:
