

**Department of Anthropology**

**ANTHRO 3355F-001: Zombies in Cultural and Historical Perspective**

**BRIEF COURSE OUTLINE**

**Fall 2025**

*Date: June 16, 2025*

**Instructor and course information:**

Instructor: Dr. Greg Beckett

Method of delivery: In person

Credit value: 0.5

Antirequisites: None.

Prerequisites: Registration in third or fourth year in any program.

Please ensure you have the correct requisites by checking [the Academic Calendar](#).

**Course Description:**

This course locates the contemporary figure of the zombie in cultural and historical perspective, with specific focus on the zombie in Haitian and American cultures. We will use a seemingly simple trope — the figure of the zombie — to explore the deep layers of history that have shaped the Atlantic world. We will begin by looking at the meaning of the zombie in Haitian culture, in relation to the experience of the transatlantic slave trade and the Haitian revolution (the only successful slave revolution in modern history). We will then look at how the zombie migrated to American popular culture during the US military occupation of Haiti from 1915–1934. During this period, the American use of the zombie has much to tell us about race and gender relations amid US imperialism. The course will then explore how the figure of the zombie took on new meaning in American cinema, in light of the tensions around race, gender, and class in US society. The contrast between the zombie in Haiti (a figure that should be saved by “raising” its consciousness) and the zombie in the United States (a dead body that consumes endlessly until it is killed again) will be used as the basis of a broader comparison between two very different but related experiences of modernity and capitalism within the broader Atlantic world.

Students will read ethnographic texts on Haitian and America culture alongside an exploration of philosophical readings and popular films. This is an essay course. Alongside weekly quizzes on the assigned readings, students will write a short analysis paper and a longer essay. There will also be a midterm exam held during a regular class session. More information on all assignments will be given in class and will be available on the course Brightspace site.

A full course schedule including a week-by-week breakdown of topics and assigned readings will be available on the course’s Brightspace site before the first day of class.

## **Course Materials:**

The following books are required and are available for purchase at the Western Bookstore (note, they may be available at lower prices elsewhere). Jonathan Lear's book, *Freud*, is also available as an eBook through the Western library.

Sigmund Freud. 2010. *Civilization and its Discontents*. New York: W.W. Norton. (Required). (\$14 on Amazon, cheaper used, and usually available online.)

Jonathan Lear. 2005. *Freud*. New York: Routledge. (Required). (\$50 new on Amazon, but cheaper used; our library also has the e-book.)

Additional readings will be available through the Course Readings link in our OWL site.

Please note (CW): we will be watching films in class during some of our weekly meetings. These films, and some readings, will contain graphic content.

Students can purchase any available editions of the above books, new or second-hand.

Additional required readings will be available through the Course Readings tool on the course site

## **Evaluation:**

**\*\* Provisional** – check with the final version before classes begin

Grades will be based on the following:

Student evaluation for this course will be based on weekly quizzes on the readings and films, an in-class mid-term exam, one short analytical paper on the course material, and a final paper. I expect you to come to class prepared to engage in discussion of the assigned readings. If you must miss a class session you are responsible for getting notes from another student. Lecture notes for missed classes will not be provided and there will be no make-up quizzes. Students may use laptops during class for taking notes or for accessing the readings. Other devices, including cell phones, music players, etc. must be turned off.

### Weekly Quizzes – 15%

There will be ten quizzes (weeks 2-11) during the term. Quizzes are to be completed online in OWL before the start of class. They will focus on the main ideas in the readings for the week and are meant to motivate you to complete all the readings before class and to give us all a starting point for discussion. There will be no make-up quizzes, but the lowest two grades will be dropped.

### Midterm Exam – 25%

Students will write an in-class mid-term exam. The exam will cover all relevant course material from the preceding classes (from weeks 1–4). The exam will feature multiple-choice, short-answer, and essay-style questions.

### Analytic Essay – 25%

Students will write a short (1000-word) paper analyzing one of the films from the course. You will have a range of prompts to choose from for your paper topic. More details will be given during class and on OWL.

### Final Essay – 35%

Students will write a larger paper (2500-word) that explores key themes, theories, and cases/films from the course. Students will develop their own thesis and argument based on prompts and suggested topics distributed in class. The final essay should be an in-depth analysis of the cultural

meanings explored in the course readings and films and must be based on your own original writing, with citations to course readings. Final essays will be due during the exam period.

More information on writing assignments, including due dates, will be made available to students on the course Brightspace site.

Weekly Quizzes	15%
Midterm Exam	25%
Analytic Essay	25%
Final Essay	35%

~ End ~