

American Studies 212
American Identities
Spring 2008

Instructor: Dr. Donna Troka
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Classroom: N304 Math & Science Bldg.

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Required Texts:

The Things They Carried by Tim O'Brien (1990)

The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros (1984)

The Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri (2004)

** readings on electronic reserve at Woodruff Library **

Course Description:

This course will enhance students' critical and analytical reading and writing skills through an interdisciplinary study of literary, historical, and sociological representations of critical issues in the United States social history. The emphasis will be on "American" writers' strategies for articulating an "American" experience and on the role of literature as metaphor for social reality as well as a catalyst for social and political change. This course consists of a multicultural cross section of people's stories, as authors and as members of diverse social groups. Throughout the course we will not only investigate different definitions of what "American" means, we will also address the multiplicity of identity. That is, we will analyze gender, race, class, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, age and the intersections among these categories.

Course Objectives:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will have acquired introductory level:

1. Practice in critical writing, oral presentation/discussion, and analysis of issues relevant to American cultural traditions and social histories.
2. Knowledge of selected literary traditions in the United States in relation to the status of "American" people, past and present and to other movements for social change.
3. Practice in critical investigation and analysis of the multiplicity and intersectionality of identity categories.

Course Requirements:

Class participation	14 points
Thinkpieces	10 points
Critical responses	16 points
Project 1	15 points
Project 2	20 points
Project 3	25 Points

TOTAL 100 Points

Class participation (14 points)

This class is based on the educational premise that knowledge is constructed through an (inter) active process rather than absorbed passively. Therefore, the format for the course will be a combination of lecture and discussion, with an emphasis on dialogue and sharing of perspectives. Attendance is crucial to your academic performance; you are expected to be an active and informed participant in all class discussions. In order to do this you must have assigned readings completed by the date on which they first appear on the syllabus. **If you miss class, you are responsible for getting notes from a classmate**, including any altered assignments, critical response topics, or announcements that were made. So it may be prudent to make a new friend early on. You can miss **two** classes without penalty, after that you will lose participation points. If you are more than ten minutes late, you will be marked absent.

Thinkpieces (10 points)

Five times during the semester you will be asked to respond in writing to some sort of stimuli (like a poem, song, picture, movie clip). This will be an exercise is what is called "low stakes" writing. That is, I will not grade for grammar or spelling, but instead this will be an opportunity for you to do some extemporaneous writing and practice developing an argument. These exercises are aimed at getting you to think and write critically and to begin to engage the material for that week. **No make-ups or late papers will be accepted.**

Critical Responses (16 points)

Four times during the semester you will be given the opportunity to improve your composition and critical thinking skills. The topics and formats of these assignments will be distributed in class. These should be one-to-two full pages, typed, double spaced, with one-inch margins; those critical responses that do not meet the minimum length requirement will not be given full credit. **No make-ups or late papers will be accepted.**

Project 1 (15 points)

Project 1 will be a **5-7 page paper** on either an assigned topic distributed later in the semester or on a topic designed by you and approved by me prior to the due date. **No late papers will be accepted.**

Project 2 (20 points)

Project 2 will be an **8-10 page paper** on either an assigned topic distributed later in the semester or on a topic designed by you and approved by me prior to the due date **No late papers will be accepted.**

Project 3 (25 points)

For your final paper you will do an “edutainment project.” This project will focus on some form of Popular Culture that is educational, entertaining, and relates to the course themes and readings. This paper must be **10-12 pages in length.**

Topics must be approved by me and must, in some way, connect to one or more of the themes we have discussed in class. **Final papers are due on Friday, May 2nd in my mailbox. No late papers will be accepted.**

All papers and assignments should be typed, double-spaced, **stapled** and have one-inch margins with a standard font size and style (i.e. 10 or 12-point font). All papers must adhere to the standard MLA research paper format. Papers should have a definite argumentative thesis presented in or near the first paragraph. This thesis will present your argument, which you will support with quotations and other specific details from the text. Your papers should be written in response to course readings and may also refer to textual issues raised in class discussions. Three important cautions: 1) papers should not simply regurgitate class discussion; 2) papers should not be plot summaries or descriptions of the texts, but instead should analyze and synthesize the texts while using critical theoretical techniques; 3) papers should focus primarily on the literary texts themselves. This means you cannot write a paper on African American men’s experiences in Vietnam. You could instead write a paper about the differences and similarities between black men and white men’s roles in Vietnam as told in The Things they Carried and Bloods and how each defined their “American” identities by these experiences. **Always print two copies of your papers and keep one for yourself.**

Please note that assignments are due on the dates designated in the syllabus. If an emergency arises and you make arrangements with me ahead of time, I may agree to accept a late assignment. If I do not agree or if you have not made prior arrangements with me, you will receive a lower grade. Be aware that my definition of “emergency” includes such things as “major cardiac surgery” and “being in labor” and not “I am hung over” or “I have another paper to write.”

Writing skills are emphasized in this class and are a major factor in determining your grade, so there will be some class time devoted to writing instruction, but you may also want to use the writing center for more extensive instruction. For more in this area, please call the Writing Center at 404.727.0886 or visit them at Room 205 A Callaway Center North.

If you are a student with a disability, you may receive extra assistance from the Office of Disability Student Services located at 110 Administration Building, their phone number is 404.727.1065. Also, please contact me if you have any type of disability and we can discuss how it may or may not affect your participation in this class.

Please read and abide by the Emory University honor code. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or academic dishonesty, please discuss them with me **BEFORE** handing in your work. For more on this go to www.emory.edu/COLLEGE/students/honor.html

Please make sure all cellular phones and pagers are turned off throughout our entire class session. If it becomes an annoyance, you will lose participation points.

Please also be certain to always bring the book and/or hard copy of the articles we are reading to class every day that we discuss it.

I reserve the right to make changes in this schedule if the need arises. Necessary changes will be announced in class

CLASS SCHEDULE

Defining America: *What is America? What is "American"? How have these definitions changed and competed with one another across time and region?*

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| Th- 01/17 | Introduction |
| Tu-01/22 | <i>Reserve</i> : Declaration of Independence, Declaration of Sentiments, Douglass, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July." |
| Th- 01/24 | <i>Reserve</i> : Levine, "From the Melting Pot to the Pluralist Vision." Baldwin, "Nobody Knows My Name."
Thinkpiece #1 |
| Tu- 01/29 | <i>Reserve</i> : Takaki, "A Different Mirror." Lipsitz, "Possessive Investment in Whiteness." Rothenberg "How White People Can Serve as Allies to People of Color in the Struggle to End Racism." |

Coming to America: *Does immigration to America affect one's ability to become American? Do cultures experience immigration differently?*

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| Th- 01/31 | <i>Reserve:</i> Steinberg, "Industrial Development" & "Why Irish Became Domestic and Italians and Jews Did Not" |
| Tu-02/05 | <i>Reserve:</i> Kingston, "The American Father"
Critical Response #1 Due |
| Th- 02/07 | Lahiri, <i>The Namesake</i> (Chap 1-3) |
| Tu- 02/12 | Lahiri, <i>The Namesake</i> (Chap 4-6)
Thinkpiece #2 |
| Th-02/14 | Lahiri, <i>The Namesake</i> (Chap 7-8) |
| Tu-02/19 | Lahiri, <i>The Namesake</i> (Chap 9-12)
PAPER ONE DUE |

Becoming American: *In his book Time Passages George Lipsitz posits that while history explains how immigrants came to America to find freedom, this history excludes African American and Native American communities who “did not come to America, but had America come to them.”*

Th-02/21 *Reserve* : Gunn Allen, “Introduction.” Erdrich, “American Horse” & Brant, “A Long Story.”

Tu-02/26 *Reserve* : Larsen, “Passing” (first half)

Th-02/28 *Reserve* : Larsen, “Passing” (second half)

Tu-03/04 *Watch Race: The Power of an Illusion, “The Story We Tell.”*
(episode 2)

Resisting/Defending America: *How do people protest, fight for or fight against “America” and “American ideals”? How are American conflicts portrayed? Are they perceived and presented differently by different groups? If so, what are the differences?*

Th-03/06 *Reserve:* Marshall, “Introduction” “Wong” (18-27) & “Stout” (84-91). Wallace, “Introduction” “Bryant” (18-32) & “Woodley” (243-265).
Critical Response #2 Due

Tu-03/11 **NO CLASS- SPRING RECESS**

Th-03/13 **NO CLASS- SPRING RECESS**

Tu-03/18 O’Brien, *The Things They Carried* (“The Things They Carried,” “Spin,” “On the Rainy River,” & “How to Tell A True War Story”)
Thinkpiece #3

Th-03/20 O’Brien, *The Things They Carried* (“Sweetheart of Song Tra Bong,” “Speaking of Courage,” “Notes,” “Good Form”)

Tu-03/25 *Watch: Shut Up and Sing*
PAPER TWO DUE

American Boundaries/Borderlands: *What and where are the borders and boundaries of American culture? What types of unique points of view are produced at these borders? Are they monolithic? Are they ambivalent?*

Th-03/27 *Reserve* : Anzaldua, "Preface," "The Homeland, Aztlan" & "Movimientos de rebeldia y las culturas que traicionan"
Begin watching "Flag Wars"

Tu-04/01 finish watching "Flag Wars"

Th- 04/03 *Reserve*: Newman, "A Letter to Harvey Milk."
Thinkpiece #4

Tu-04/08 Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street* (1-50)

Th- 04/10 *The House on Mango Street* (51-110)
Critical Response #3 Due

The Paradox of American Food Culture: *Does our "American-ness" impact or inform the food that we consume? What is American food? Does the definition change across time and region?*

Tu- 04/15 *Reserve*: Pollan, "Our National Eating Disorder"
Schlosser, "Behind the Counter"
Thinkpiece #5 Due

Th-04/17 *Reserve*: Kingsolver, "Called Home" + "Six Impossible Things Before Breakfast"

Tu- 04/22 Guest Lecture: Daniel Parsons, Georgia Organic Farmer

Th- 04/24 Course Conclusion
Critical Response #4 Due

**FINAL PAPER DUE ON FRIDAY, MAY 2nd BY NOON
(in my mailbox S415 Callaway)**

