

MYTH AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF AMERICAN IDENTITY

“What defines an American?” Is it the love of liberty, the pursuit of justice, the urge to invent, the desire for wealth, the drive to explore? The purpose of this seminar is to examine--through reading, discussion, and writing-- historical origins of and perspectives on “American identity,” to investigate the stories about ourselves and our past that we have developed to illustrate and confirm its elements, and to assess ongoing claims to American exceptionalism. This is not a lecture course; its success depends on the class’s active engagement of the material. Expect to arrive for each class well-prepared and ready to talk.

PROFESSOR

Penne Restad restad@austin.utexas.edu 475-7233
Office hours T 12:30-2:00p. and by apt. GAR 2.144

COURSE WEBSITE: Canvas <https://utexas.instructure.com/courses>
note: Firefox tends to be more responsive, although Canvas has been working well.

REQUIRED READING

Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic*
Horatio Alger, *Ragged Dick* Available here
http://books.google.com/books/about/Ragged_Dick.html?id=ZDITW1GNBJ0C
Tom Englehardt, *The End of Victory Culture*
Jim Cullen, *The American Dream*
Leigh Edwards, *Johnny Cash* (also an audio book)
Readings, available on JSTOR or Canvas as noted.

COURSE GOALS

Comprehend, ponder, and discuss key ideas, events, and interpretations relating to the history of American identity.
Participate fully and effectively in seminar discussions and projects.
Write (and rewrite) analytical papers that reflect independent thinking and sound use of evidence.
Present ideas effectively using formal oral, written, and visual formats.

CIVILITY, HONESTY, ETC.

It is your personal and social responsibility to attend every class, be on time, and stay for the entire class. Late arrival, early departure, ringing cell phones, texting, tweeting, surfing, FB’ing, sleeping, etc. distract and disrupt the entire class. Your courtesy is necessary and appreciated. Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259 <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>. Medical assistance/ counseling services are available at <http://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/>. If you have concerns about the behavior or well-being of any member of the campus community, call BCAL at 512-232-5050.
www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal

WRITING. I strongly encourage you to use the Undergraduate Writing Center, FAC 211, 471-6222: <http://www.uwc.utexas.edu/>). The UWC offers free, individualized, expert help with writing for any UT undergraduate, by appointment or on a drop-in basis. These services are not just for

writing that has "problems." Getting feedback from an informed audience is a normal part of a successful writing project. The UWC's trained consultants work with students from every department on both academic and non-academic writing. Using methods that preserve the integrity of your work, they help you develop strategies to improve your writing and become a more independent writer. Whether you are writing a lab report, a resume, a term paper, a statement for an application, or your own poetry, UWC consultants will be happy to work with you. You will find good information here as well: <http://uwc.utexas.edu/handouts>.

ACADEMIC HONESTY. It is also your personal responsibility to be honest and aware of what constitutes dishonesty. Plagiarism or any action that violates the letter and intent of academic honesty policies is explained fully here http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/spot_honorcode.php. Any violation will be punished to the fullest extent possible, up to and including failing the course and suspension from UT.



NOT EVEN PAST www.notevenpast.org is the UT History Department blog.

GRADING

Grades will be determined on the basis class participation and attendance (15%), short papers (40%), individual and collaborative visual presentations (5%) and a 7 to 10-page research paper project (assembled in stages) (40%). Plus and minus will be used in assigning a course grade. Grades will be posted on Canvas.

Participation And Attendance 15%

Seminar participants are expected to arrive on time and prepared, and to abide by the guidelines established by the class. You may miss two class meetings for any reason. Additional absence will result in one-half grade deducted from your final course grade for each day missed. Do not ask for exceptions. Arriving late and leaving early may be considered "absence" as well.

Individual And Collaborative Visual Presentations--5%

Writing

"This course carries the Writing Flag. Writing Flag courses are designed to give students experience with writing in an academic discipline. In this class, you can expect to write regularly during the semester, complete substantial writing projects, and receive feedback from your instructor to help you improve your writing. You will also have the opportunity to revise one or more assignments, and you may be asked to read and discuss your peers' work. Writing Flag classes meet the Core Communications objectives of Critical Thinking, Communication, Teamwork, and Personal Responsibility, established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board." <http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/ccc/teaching-resources/syllabus>.

EMAIL REQUIREMENTS

All written papers will be emailed to restad@austin.utexas.edu. Submissions *must* use **docx** (only) format and be styled **350.LASTNAME.DATE**. For example: **350.Smithers.Sept4**. (This allows me to sort email efficiently and comment effectively on your work.)

Papers must be sent at least as **60 minutes before class begins**. Late papers (arriving after 2:35 p. on class meeting day) will be docked one half grade, and docked one full grade for each additional late day. You must complete all assignments to the professor's standards to pass the course, regardless of lateness.

WRITTEN FORMAT

Title your paper

Double-space, standard font and margins for the body of the paper.

Cite sources of quotes, paraphrases, and ideas. See Academic Dishonesty warning.

Use Chicago Manual of Style.

Quick guide http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

Number pages

Weekly Papers 40%. Each student will write a number of short papers (usually 1 to 2 pages each week), due as noted. Any specific writing topics (and "weights") will be posted on Canvas approximately one week before a paper is due.

Final Project --40%. Each student will create a plan for a 20-page research paper on a topic related to American identity. The prospectus will include an annotated bibliography, a thesis statement, and a detailed topic outline of the proposed paper. The paper topic will be developed in consultation with class members and professor. The final project will be presented in an oral report to the class.

SCHEDULE OF CLASS MEETINGS & READING ASSIGNMENTS

WEEK READINGS

This syllabus is a general guideline. The sequence, topics, and dates are subject to change, in which case sufficient notice will be given. Check Canvas regularly for assignment details. Reading assignments and any additional preparation are to be completed before coming to class on the date they are listed.

I

Jan. 14 Introduction.
Jan. 16 Crevecouer, "What is an American?" (Canvas)

II

Jan. 21 MLK holiday. No Class.
Jan. 23 Slideshow presentations.

III

Jan. 28 Discussion of slideshows.
Jan. 30 Alger, *Ragged Dick*

IV

Feb. 4 Read one of the following articles:
Michael Steiner, "From Frontier to Region: Frederick Jackson Turner and the New Western History,"
Michael P. Malone, "Beyond the Last Frontier: Toward a New Approach to Western American History,"
Feb. 6 Who's or what's missing and why? Independent research and report.

V

Feb. 11 Baldwin, "My Dungeon Shook"
Feb. 13 David R. Jansson, "American National Identity and the Progress of the New South in "National Geographic Magazine."

VI

Feb. 18 Horvitz, *Confederates in the Attic*
Feb. 20 cont.

VII

Feb. 25 David Potter, "Democracy and Abundance"
Feb. 27 Discuss final project. Guidelines will be handed out or posted on Canvas

VIII

Mar. 4 Cullen, *American Dream*
Mar. 6 cont.

IX

Mar. 11 SPRING BREAK

X

Mar. 18 Kao and Copulsky, "The Pledge of Allegiance"
Mar. 20 Michael Kammen, "The Problem of American Exceptionalism: A Reconsideration"
American Quarterly,

DUE FRIDAY by 5 p.m: Well-constructed paragraph that describes Your final paper thesis, and a tentative bibliography of at least 15 sources, arranged by article and book, alphabetically and in proper bibliographic form.

XI

Mar. 25 Discussion: American Dream.
Mar. 27 Organization: American Dream

XII.

Apr. 1 Englehardt, *End of Victory Culture*
Apr. 3 cont.

XIII

Apr. 8 Edwards, *Johnny Cash*
Apr. 10 cont.

DUE: One-page statement of paper thesis; topic outline of proposed paper; and at least five of its bibliographic sources annotated. **Note:** there are three parts to this assignment.

XIV

Apr. 15 Schildkraut, "The More Things Change" Canvas pdf
Apr. 17 Drafts returned. Discussion about problems encountered.

XV

Apr. 22 Paper Presentations
Apr. 24 Paper Presentations

XVI

Apr. 29 Paper Presentations
May 1 Paper Presentations and Evaluation

May 5 DUE by 5 p.m.; Final project HARD COPY ONLY. This includes all draft material with comments, as well as the completed work. Turn in at my office, GAR 2.144

