HUM 370 HONORS: AMERICAN CULTURE

Lecture
10:00am-10:50am
MWF

EBA-444

Office Hours
AL-669
Monday 11 AM -12 PM & 2-3 PM
Friday 11 AM -12 AM
And by appointment

San Diego State University

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Course description
This course will survey a rich panorama of (US) American culture, from the chronicles of the “first encounter” to the most recent of contemporary texts. The emphasis will be on following a number of tracks in American culture i.e, the cultural processes giving way to its rich textual expression. In order to accomplish this ambitious objective, we will lend our attention to key (audio/visual) texts in light of the most representative creators and the specific sociopolitical and historical contexts of productions. In this manner, we will first take a look at the literature of the “first encounters,” and other texts stemming from indigenous oral traditions. We will then
continue with key texts from the various voices that could be said to have formed the kaleidoscope of American culture across a number of watershed moments in US history, since the outbreak of the American Civil War. From Cabeza de Vaca to Abraham Lincoln, from Zora Neale Hurston to Harold and Kumar (who go to White Castle), this course endeavors to explore the different ways in which this nation has been perceived, spoken for and/or represented.

Goals and Objectives
• Using vocabulary of literary analysis, the student will identify major cultural trends and representative American authors/creators.
• The student will recognize varied theoretical approaches to cultural studies analysis.
• Both in class discussion and in written assignments, the student will examine the filmic, historical, and social contexts as well as the form (or aesthetic structure) of the cultural artifacts studied in class.

Required Texts
Alexie. Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian.
Spiegelman. Maus I: Survivor’s Tale.
Vonnegut. Slaughterhouse Five.
Parks. Topdog/Underdog.
Hudes. Elliot, A Soldier’s Fugue.
Diaz. Brief Wonderous Life of Oscar Wao.
Greenlee. The Spook Who Sat by the Door.
Keltner. Dim Sum of all Things.
Huston. Their Eyes Were Watching God.
Okada. No No Boy.

*All additional readings will be available electronically on BB*

Grade Breakdown
Final exam..........................................................30%
Mid term exam....................................................15%
Final paper..........................................................23%
Journal.............................................................22%
Dramatic interpretation.................................10%

Midterm and Final Exam
There will be one in-class midterm exam (15% of the final grade) on Oct 20, 2014. It will be made up of short comprehension questions and a short-essay question.

The final exam (30% of the final grade) is structured in the same manner but is of wider extension. It is scheduled for Friday, Dec. 12 (1030-1230) and it will cover the material covered throughout the course.

Please go to the course website for sample questions and the grading rubric for the essay portions of the exams.
Final Paper
In three parts (all formatted according to MLA standards):

1. The proposal consists of a two paragraph document; it must include a description of the chosen topic, the intended focus, and a possible thesis. An exploratory list of scholarly primary and secondary sources should also be included. The proposal will be discussed at a private conference with the professor during office hours or any other adequate time. *Due at the beginning of class on Sept 29, 2014.*

2. The first draft (4 pages) should include a strong introduction that lays out a clear plan of action for the final paper. This draft should also then carry out the first half part of the stated plan. *Due at the beginning of class on Oct 27, 2014*

3. The final paper (7-8 pages) is due on the last day of class. Playing off the proposal and first draft, the final paper should reflect a strong focus on works by one or two of the authors studied in class. This should be an original critical essay consisting of the student’s own interpretation, but drawing on scholarly secondary sources (a minimum of 3) that are relevant to the argument. *Due at the beginning of class on Dec 10th, 2014*

The argument must be clear, coherent, and well supported while engaging closely with the text/s. The thesis or main idea/s must be clearly stated in the paper’s introduction. The paper is not a summary.

*Late paper or commentary submission will be automatically penalized 10 points for each day beyond the due date.*

Journal
At the beginning of each class (with no possibility of extensions unless justified by medical or compassionate reasons), each student will hand in a personal reflection on the reading/s of the day. The text (150-200 words) should demonstrate the students understanding of the readings. The students may focus on particular aspects they have found to be interesting and/or on the connections to texts from the course and beyond. Do not worry about the grammar or composition. This is a free thought exercise and so feel free to explore your creative side by adding your own illustrations or poetic/philosophical touches! Having collected these reflections, the professor will assign a pass/fail grade, and return them to the students at the beginning of each week. The students are asked to hold on to these entries in order submit them all together towards the end of the term as part of their individual writing portfolio. Along with these entries, the student is asked to submit an evaluation (2-3 pages, double spaced, MLA formatting) of the themes and topics they have encountered throughout the course, of their own writing and thought processes throughout their term.

Dramatic interpretation
Based on one of the literary or filmic texts seen in class, the students will form (3-4 person) groups in order to put together a (2-3 min) filmic dramatic interpretation to be presented to the class on the last day of classes. You may make use of as many resources as you see fit (cell phones, camcorders, DSLRs, animation, puppets, photographs, voice over narration, interpretative dance etc.). Each group must also provide a two page (double spaced, times new roman, 12 font size) justification and discussion of the development of the project, the form, the content and relevance of the interpretation to the original text. Students will be motivated to upload their creations to social media such as Youtube.com or Vimeo.com.

Grade Scale:
100-90% -- A
89 -80% -- B
79 -70% -- C
69 -60% -- D
59 -00% -- F

In order to earn an A in this course, students have to comply with the following criteria:
• near perfect attendance & excellent and consistent preparation in class;
• active and thoughtful participation in individual and group activities;
• outstanding ability to move easily from theory to application; that is, to apply the concepts, terms and strategies studied in class;
• high levels of competency during exams, oral presentations, class discussions and written assignments.

If you are unable or unwilling to commit your time and effort at this time, consider taking the course when your schedule is a little lighter, or your job or family responsibilities allow you to spend the required time to succeed in this course.

If you miss class: Communicate with another classmate to keep up. No need to write to me, make sure you come prepared next class. You have 3 absences to use for unexpected events.

Please take names of 2 classmates to contact:
Name__________________ email__________________ phone__________________
Name__________________ email__________________ phone__________________

**Due dates for Graded assignments**

Exams: If you missed an exam you will be able to take a make up only if you have a document excuse of an extraordinary circumstance, otherwise you will receive a 0 for the exam.

Final paper: Due in class. Grade lowered 10 points per day is late. After 3 days max. grade will be C.

**Electronic devices**

Not allowed in class. Computers should be off unless I request you to used them in the context of a special activity. If you have a disability that requires special equipment please communicate with me ASAP.

**Students with Disabilities**

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at (619) 594-6473. To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated.

**Group work ethics and evaluation**

Collaborative learning is one of the most powerful tools we have to provide students with a comfortable environment in which they can explore, discuss and rehearse their ideas. However, the many advantages cited can be neutralized by certain behaviors. Students will have to abide to the following rules:

1. Always bring your written assignments.
2. Come to class prepared to discuss your readings.
3. Write down the questions or problems you encountered while reading the texts.
4. Do not monopolize the discussion.
5. Offer constructive criticism without being judgmental.
6. If there are problems of any nature in your group, bring them to my attention as
soon as possible. 7. Build the group as a "community of learners" by meeting outside of class to talk about assignments or prepare for exams.

**Drop/Add Policy:**
It is the student’s responsibility to add/drop class. Please refer to SDSU’s Schedule of Classes for deadlines and procedures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1 Introduction &amp; First Encounters</th>
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| Aug 25th  
Introduction  
MLA format & Research tips. |
| Aug 27th  
Cabeza de Vaca. 48-97. |
| Aug 29th  
*John Burnett’s Story of the Trail of Tears.*  
-“Indians claim Italy by right of discovery.”  
Screening. *The Last of the Mohicans.* |

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<th>Week 2- First African/American Narratives</th>
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| Sept 1st Holiday—Labor Day.  
Faculty/staff holiday. Campus closed.  
Sept 3  
Olaudah Equiano. From *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself.*  
Sept 5  
Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass* (1845). |

| Week 3  
The American Civil War and “The Birth of a [white/black] Nation” |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sept 8th  
-Screening: *Birth of Nation.* Dir. W.D. Griffith.  
Sept 10th  
--Screening: *Birth of Nation.* Dir. W.D. Griffith. cont-  
Sept 12th  
Uncle *Tom’s Cabin.* Chap 1 and 12. |
### Week 4
*Strange Fruit and Murieta.*

Sept 15th
Read: Meeropol’s *Strange Fruit.*
* NPR

Look at images collected in *withoutsanctuary.org*


Sept 17th
From *The life and adventures of Joaquin Murieta.*

**Sept 19- Family Weekend Starts. No Classes.**

### Week 5
*Inter-vellum African American Narrative.*

Sept 20
Neale Hurston, Zora. *Their Eyes were Watching God.* Ch 1-7

Sept 22
Neale Hurston, Zora. *Their Eyes were Watching God.* Ch 8-15

Sept 24
Neale Hurston, Zora. *Their Eyes were Watching God.* Ch 16-20

### Week 6
*WWII and Strategies of Remembering.*

Sept 29
& Vonnegut, Kurt. *Slaughter house Five.* Ch 1-3

Oct 1
Vonnegut, Kurt. *Slaughter house Five.* Ch 4-6

Oct 3
Vonnegut, Kurt. *Slaughter house Five.* Ch 7-9

Screening: *Bataan.* Dir. Garnett, Tay. 1943

### Week 7
*Contesting Narratives of WWII*

Oct 6
Okada, John. *No-No Boy.* Ch 1-4

Oct 8
Okada, John. *No-No Boy.* Ch 5-7
Oct 10
Okada, John. *No-No Boy*. Ch 8-10

Screening: *Zoot Suit*. Dir. Luis Valdez.

**Week 8**  Post War Blues.

Oct 13, 15, 17

Wilson, Sloan. *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*.


**Week 9**  Post War Optimism.

Oct 20, 22, 24

**Midterm Exam. Oct 20\textsuperscript{th}, 2014.**

Raphaelson, S. *The Day of Atonement*.

Screening in class: *Singin\’ in the Rain*.
Scenes from: *I Love Lucy + Leave it to Beaver*.

**Week 10**  Bamboozled.

Oct 27, 29, 31

**Essay proposal is due at the beginning of class on Sept 29\textsuperscript{th}, 2014.**


Suzan Lori Parks: *Topdog/underdog*.

Screening: *Bamboozled*. Dir. Spike Lee.

**Week 11**  The Spook

Nov 3, 5, 7

Greenlee, Sam. *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*.


**Week 12**  A Soldier’s Fugue

Hudes, Quiara Alegria. *Elliot, a Soldier’s Fugue*. Read complete by Nov 10th.
### Week 13

**The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian.**

- **Nov 17**

- **Nov 19**

- **Nov 21**

**Recommended:**

Zitkala-sa: “*Impressions of an Indian Childhood.*” “*The School Days of an Indian Girl.*” “*An Indian Teacher among Indians.*”

### Week 14

**The Dim Sum of All Things.**

- **Nov 24 & 26**

  **Nov 26. Essay first draft due.**

  - Wong Keltner, Kim. *The Dim Sum of All Things.*

  **Nov 26-28**- Thanksgiving Recess Commences. No classes.

### Week 15

**The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao.**

- **Dec 1**
  - Diaz, Junot. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao.* Ch 1-3

- **Dec 3**
  - Diaz, Junot. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao.* Ch 4-6

- **Dec 5**
  - Diaz, Junot. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao.* Ch 7-8

  **Screening:** *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle.* Danny Leiner. 2004

### Week 16

- **Dec 8**

  **Screening of class videos.**

  **Dec 10th** - Last day of classes. Review.

### Week 17

- **Dec 11-17** FINAL WEEK

  **Final Exam**
Friday, Dec. 12
1030-1230

*Instructor retains the right to adjust the course design throughout the term.*
Any major changes to the course syllabus will be announced in class, communicated to all students electronically, and incorporated into an updated and posted version of the syllabus.