

Engl 361
Sec 2191
Fall 2010
T, F 12:15-1:30

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The American Dream

It is hard not to take the title of this course with a grain of salt. What is the American dream? And what do we expect from these two words shoved together uncomfortably? If we look to the *Declaration of Independence* as a guideline we are told our inalienable rights are “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Here are three more keywords placed awkwardly together, especially if we read the text in the fullness of the historical moment when life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are inalienable rights only extended to a specific race and gender. Having placed a historical valence onto our imagining of America and the American dream, the course will focus primarily on late twentieth century experiences of America.

Primary readings:

Confidence-Man Herman Melville ISBN: 0810119684
Absalom, Absalom! William Faulkner ISBN: 067973218
Howl Allen Ginsburg ISBN: 872860175
Times Square Red Times Square Blue Samuel Delany ISBN: 0814719201
Angels in America Tony Kushner ISBN: 1559362316
Donald Duk Frank Chin ISBN: 0918273838
The Crying of Lot 49 Thomas Pynchon ISBN: 006091307X
Paradise Toni Morrison 318 pages ISBN: 0452280397
I will also make a series of secondary reading available to you.

Requirements and Expectations

1. First, as a general reminder this is an upper level English course and I expect that all students have completed previous English courses and, at the very least, have a basic sense of textual analysis including an ability to discuss thematic and technical aspects of the readings.

2. Attendance and Participation: I expect you to attend every meeting of the course. Attendance does not mean only appearing in class; I want you fully present and engaged on every theoretical and ontological level. In other words, I expect you to come to class prepared to speak intelligently or earnestly about the texts; furthermore you should be equally attentive to your peers questions and comments. You must bring your reading to every class. If you do not have your text I will count you absent for the day. If you know you are going to be absent from class please let me know ahead of time and get any assignments to me by the time they are due even if you will not be present in that class. Participation counts for **twenty percent of your grade (20%)**. If I find participation is lacking in the class I will begin giving quizzes.

3. Group Presentation: For each text a group will be in charge of leading a discussion on a relevant theme. For instance, when reading *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* I might ask you to lead a discussion about Stonewall and the gay rights movement. I will post topics and you will select one. The group presentation counts for **twenty percent of your grade (20%)**.

4. Papers: There will be two **ten-page** papers in the course. I expect each paper to demonstrate research on the topic by using secondary texts. The papers represent **sixty percent of your grade (60%)**. The formatting requirements for the papers are:

- MLA Format
- Times New Roman 12 point or similar font
- Double Spaced
- Every assignment you give me must be stapled

5. In Class Behavior: As you are upper division students all this should be redundant. Yet it helps both you and I if I make a few of my expectations clear:

- Turn your phones off upon entering the classroom. Do not text, do not call, etc. I will ask you to leave the class if I see you using your phones and this will count against your participation grade.
- I don't mind if you drink in class, but do not eat. Food can be extremely distracting in the classroom. If you bring drinks into the classroom please throw them away when you leave.
- Carefully listen to each other.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is using another person's idea, opinion or theory (in any form, i.e. graphs, prose, etc.) by direct quote or paraphrase without giving credit for it. If you are caught plagiarizing you will fail the course. Writing a paper is much quicker than taking the class over again. Plagiarizing does not save you time. Do not tell me that you did not know that what you were doing was plagiarism. If you have questions about any of this ask right now. I consider the existence of this document proof enough that you understand what plagiarism is.

A General Note: Many of the texts in this course have moments that some might find unsettling. This is a fact of literature and of art. I expect you to read all of the texts even if you find them shocking, disturbing, or upsetting.

SPECIAL ACCOMODATION: If you have a learning, sensory, or physical reason for special accommodation in this class, contact the Office of Special Services in 171 Kiely Hall at 718-997-5870 and please inform me.

Tentative Schedule of Readings (subject to change):

8/27: First Day of Class. Introductions

8/31: *Sermon and I Too*

9/3: *Confidence Man*

9/7: *Confidence Man*

9/10: no class

9/14: classes follow a Friday schedule. *Confidence Man*. Presentation on figures of tricksters. Handout: Michel Foucault's *Of Other Spaces*

9/17: No class

9/21: *Absalom, Absalom!*

9/24: *Absalom, Absalom!*

9/28: *Absalom, Absalom!*

10/1: *Absalom, Absalom!* Presentation on Colonialism. Handout: Edouard Glissant's *Closed Place, Open Word*

10/5: *Howl*

10/8: *Howl* Presentation McCarthyism

10/12: *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* Handout: Michael Warner's *Fear of a Queer Planet*

10/15: *Angels in America*

10/19: *Angels in America*

10/22: *Angels in America* Presentation on Representations of AIDS in the US, Handout: David Savran's *Ambivalence, Utopia, and a Queer Sort of Materialism: How Angels in America Reconstructs the Nation*

10/26: *Angels in America* **First Paper Due**

10/29: *Donald Duk*

11/2: *Donald Duk* Presentation Migrant Labor Handout: David Eng *I've Been (Re)working on the Railroad: Photography and National History in China Men and Donald Duk*

11/5: *The Crying of Lot 49*

11/9: *The Crying of Lot 49*

11/12: *The Crying of Lot 49* Presentation Postmodernism Handouts: Gilles Deleuze *Postscript on Control Societies*

11/16: *Paradise*

11/19: *Paradise*

11/23: *Paradise*

11/26: Thanksgiving College Closed

11/30: *Paradise* Presentation Civil Rights Movement Handout: Fredric Jameson's *Periodizing the 60s*

12/3: 25th Hour Handout Phillip Wegner's *The Two Deaths of the 1990s*

12/7: TBA

12/10: Last Day of Class

12/14-12/21: Finals **Final Paper Due**