

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

Department of Africana Studies

INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN CULTURES

Fall 2015

Mondays, 6:40-9:30pm
Tillett Hall Room 116
Course # 01:014:140
Index # 04125

Instructor: Anitha Ramachandran, Ph.D.
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AIM OF THE COURSE

American society has a long history of debating whether and how the country's public institutions should recognize cultural difference. While the narrative of how the United States was settled has always been contentious, the argument over the roles played by various groups in the development of the United States as a nation has intensified in recent years. Some observers argue that diversity and pluralism, which always existed in the United States, should be truthfully reflected in the nation's institutions, policies, and history as part of an attempt to rectify existing inequalities. They argue that the social standing of different groups in the course of American history ought to be understood alongside the development of a collective identity constituting the American "nation". Others argue that paying attention to groups rather than the nation as a whole, or the individuals who constitute the nation, would lead to group isolation, the balkanization of society, and the subversion of the goal of national unity. Proponents of this perspective also argue that an emphasis on difference makes it difficult for us to find common goals and values. The idea of "America" may be jeopardized, they contend, as knowledge is subjected to cultural nationalism and a relativist perspective that favors special interests while ignoring the common good.

The goal of this course is to introduce students to debates in American society, discuss the process of identity construction in the United States, and consider the political struggles that have come out of this process. The course will examine how historical circumstances as well as current socio-economic, political, and cultural conditions affect cultural relations in the United States. In light of these considerations, the course will then explore what it means to be "American".

REQUIRED READINGS

Posted on SAKAI

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students are responsible for ALL course material and the requirements cited below:

1. Lectures
2. Readings
3. Quiz
4. Final Examination

GRADE DETERMINATION

Quiz: 30%

Final Examination: 70%

COURSE POLICY

Office hours with the instructor are intended to clarify students' doubts and improve their understanding of specific issues. Students are encouraged to meet with the instructor whenever they require assistance, after class, or during office hours.

Attendance: If you expect to miss classes on certain dates, you must report your absence through the School of Arts and Science Absentee Reporting System.

Students are required to KEEP COPIES of any work submitted. Late assignments will not be accepted without documented reasons and points may be deducted. Make-up exams will be given only under extenuating circumstances.

Academic Integrity: Principles of academic integrity require that every Rutgers University student: properly acknowledge and cite all use of the ideas, results, or words of others properly acknowledge all contributors to a given piece of work make sure that all work submitted as his or her own in a course or other academic activity is produced without the aid of unsanctioned materials or unsanctioned collaboration obtain all data or results by ethical means and report them accurately without suppressing any results inconsistent with his or her interpretation or conclusions treat all other students in an ethical manner, respecting their integrity and right to pursue their educational goals without interference. This requires that a student neither facilitate academic dishonesty by others nor obstruct their academic progress uphold the canons of the ethical or professional code of the profession for which he or she is preparing. Adherence to these principles is necessary in order to insure that: everyone is given proper credit for his or her ideas, words, results, and other scholarly accomplishments all student work is fairly evaluated and no student has an inappropriate advantage over others the academic and ethical development of all students is fostered the reputation of the University for

integrity in its teaching, research, and scholarship is maintained and enhanced. Failure to uphold these principles of academic integrity threatens both the reputation of the University and the value of the degrees awarded to its students. Every member of the University community therefore bears a responsibility for ensuring that the highest standards of academic integrity are upheld. See <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-at-rutgers> for further details. You may also take a 20 minute interactive-tutorial on Plagiarism and Academic - <http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/douglass/sal/plagiarism/intro.html>.

READING SCHEDULE

Introduction and Overview

M Oct 26: Introduction and Overview

Reed, J.W. (2006) "Columbus and the Making of American Identity," James W. Reed, in E. Ramsamy and G.T. Tate (eds) *The Black Experience in America*, Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt

Begley, S. (1995) "Three is not enough" in *Newsweek*, February 13.

One Nation, Global Origins

M Nov 2: "On the Pulse of the Morning" Poem read by Maya Angelou at President Bill Clinton's inauguration.

Barber, B. (1992) "To Be an American" in *An Aristocracy of Everyone: The Politics of Education and the Future of America*, New York: Ballantine Books, pp. 40-77.

The Problem of the Color Line: the Black/White Binary and Beyond

M Nov 9: King, Jr. M. L. (1963) "Letter From a Birmingham Jail"

Morrison, T. (1993) "On the Backs of Blacks" *Time*

Takaki, R. (1993) "A Different Mirror" Chapter 1, Boston: Little, Brown, and Company. pp 1-17

M Nov 16: Takaki, R. (1993) "El Norte: The Borderland of Chicano America" in *A Different Mirror*, New York: Little, Brown.

The Economist (2015) “Special Report: America’s Hispanics – From Minor to Major.” March 14 issue.

Social Construction: Identity, Prejudice and Stereotypes

M Nov 23: hooks, b. (1995) “Feminism: A Transformational Politic” in P.S. Rothenberg (ed.) *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States*, New York: St. Martin’s Press

Allport, G. W. (1989) “Formation of In-Groups” in G. Colombo *et al* (eds), *Rereading America*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, pp. 85-101.

Lorde, A. (1988) “Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference” in P. S. Rothenberg, (ed.) *Racism and Sexism: An Integrated Study*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, pp. 352-359.

The Economist (2014) “So far, so fast.” October 11-17 issue.

The Class-Race Divide in American Society

M Nov 30: Von Drehle, D. (2015) “The Roots of a Riot: Baltimore’s Eruption Follows Decades of Systemic Failure.” *Time Magazine*, May 11.

Bronner, S. E.(2011) “Walking Wall Street” *Logos* vol. 10, issue 4.

Meacham, J. (2012) “The History of the American Dream: Is it Still Real?” *Time*, July 2, pp. 26-39.

Coates, T. (2015) “Letter to My Son,” *The Atlantic*, September 2015.

Who is an “American” in the era of deepening globalization?

M Dec 7 Bronner, S. (2014) “The Bigot Today” in *The Bigot: Why Prejudice Persists*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Parrillo, V. N. (2009) “The Next Horizon” in *Diversity in America*, Los Angeles: Pine Forge Press

Ramachandran, K. (2011) “Black-Asian Relations in the United States: Negotiating Globalization and

Racialization” in E. Ramsamy and G. T. Tate (eds) *The Black Experience in America*, Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt

Harris, F. (2015) “The Next Civil Rights Movement?” *Dissent*, Summer 2015.

Final Examination:

Date, location, and time to be announced