Nearly everyday a public figure refers to "the American people" in terms of what Americans want, believe, value, think, and feel. In this course we will examine that phrase by addressing the question "What does it mean to be American?"

Notice that the subject of the course is cultural diversity as it can be understood through literature. Thus we will reflect on the central question through a study of contemporary literature (novel, short stories and essays) written by authors from three historically underrepresented American groups—Native American, Mexican American, and African American. Our aim will not be a definite answer to the question but rather a deeper wisdom and more understanding about what American means. The course will also include a study of two films and a few selected readings about racial/cultural diversity.

A thoughtful engagement with all of the course material will prepare you to live and work as members of a global society at a time when an American identity is being defined in the context of a global marketplace and a global war on terror.

You might be wondering: where's the Finnish American? the Irish American? the Polish American? My answer has four parts: (1) In fourteen weeks, there is barely time to begin with three groups because a superficial study of cultural diversity creates stereotypes. (2) Today more than a third of Americans do not trace their heritage to a European culture, so it's important to learn about the non-European cultures contributing to American identity. (3) The course title also refers to "the Americas" so even though we in the US often think of ourselves as the only Americans, remember that "the Americas" include all of North America, Central America, South America—again, way too broad a scope to address in 14 weeks. (4) I wish we had the time to do additional cultural explorations. I hope you'll have a desire to continue learning more about cultural diversity when the course is over.

**Course Texts**

**Mexican American**

**Native American**

**African American**

Selected Course Readings available through instructor’s website listed above

**Course Work**

1. Daily preparation, attendance, and participation (More than 3 absences lowers your final grade. We need a variety of contributing perspectives for this course to work.)
2. Recognition Quizzes (if you read and review before class, you'll be "recognized" with A's.)
3. Reflection Questions (Bring one good discussion question each day that invites others to reflect and share thoughts on a reading. This question may often need to be accompanied by a short paragraph explaining what in the reading or the context of the course triggered your question. In other words, a brief explanation of where the question is coming from or where you are coming from)
4. **Context Report**—Prepare and deliver a report that provides historical, cultural, geographic, economic, political, biographical, sociological, scientific, spiritual, or ecological information that contributes to deeper understanding of a reading selection.

5. **Discussion Leader of a reading selection** (can be done individually or in a group of two or three)

6. **Final Project and Presentation**

7. **Large and Small Group Participation**

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**Grade Distribution** (all assignments must be completed to pass the course)

- **Weekly Quizzes/Reflection Questions**: 35%
- **Context Report**: 10%
- **Panel Discussion**: 10%
- **Final Project and Presentation**: 35%
- **Peer Evaluations**: 10%

Criteria include: Quality of preparation and reliability; quality of insight and ideas, quality of respect for individuals, quality of contribution to group process.

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**Important keys for successful participation**

- Complete the reading done *before* class.
- Demonstrate respect for others, personal honesty, openness.
- Bring the book under discussion to class and mark pages you like.
- Speak from your experience and from the readings rather than generalize about what “people” say.

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MTU complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disability Act of 1990 (ADA). If you have a disability and need a reasonable accommodation for equal access to education or services at MTU, please call Dr. Gloria Melton, Dean of Students, (7-2212). For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department head, or the Affirmative Action Office (7-3310).