Course Information: Cultural Diversity in Literature of the Americas
HU 2520/Spring 2008
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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 docs 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 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 scope of the course title is very broad: "the Americas" include all of North America, Central America, South America, so the instructor of record must focus on particular groups and themes. 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.

Discussing controversial topics
The course reading includes some controversial topics, including race relations, social class, sexual orientation, sexual development, and sexual relations. Some of the authors use coarse language. A mature attitude and open mind are required. Remember that you will not be pressured to change your values but you will be expected to think about controversial issues, to express and listen to a range of perspectives, and to understand the values and experiences of others.

Reading literature allows us to occupy the lives of others who are different from us, thus it challenges and expands our moral and ethical intelligence. Through the reading this semester, we will engage with issues that are endemic in our culture but not often effectively addressed in school, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, physical and emotional abuse perpetrated by others as well as abuse inflicted on the self (anorexia, drug and alcohol addiction).

A thoughtful engagement with the course material will prepare you to live and work as a member of a complex society and to identify your options for transforming the social future.

Required Course Texts
Mexican American

Native American

**African American**


**Selected Course Readings.** Copies made available in class and on course email list.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Quizzes/Reflection Questions</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context Report</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel Discussion</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Project and Presentation</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Evaluations</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Criteria include: Quality of preparation and reliability; quality of insight and ideas, quality of respect for individuals, quality of contribution to group process.

**Course Work**

1. **Daily preparation, attendance, and participation**
   - **Absence policy:** More than 3 absences will lower your final grade. The limit of 3 absences includes both excused and unexcused. Excused absences must be handled through the Dean of Students Office. If unusual circumstances create a situation calling for more than three excused absences, be sure to keep me informed and be sure to have these absences handled by the Dean of Students Office. Regardless of the reason for your absences, you are expected to make up the work you missed, including missed quizzes.
   - **Cell phones and other electronic devices are distractions for yourself and others.** Be sure they are turned off and put away during class.
   - **Keys for successful participation**
     - Schedule your time to complete the reading.
     - As you read each book, mark passages that you like or that seem significant to you.
     - Review these passages after you complete the book.
     - During discussion, demonstrate respect for others and interest in their ideas.
     - Be open and honest about what you think.
     - Always bring the book under discussion to class.
     - Speak from your experience and from the readings rather than generalize about what "people" think and say.

2. **Reading Quizzes**
   - The reading quizzes are intended to promote timely and careful reading. If you do the reading, you'll find it easy to do well on the quizzes, and your good quiz grades will be your reward for being prepared. The quizzes focus primarily on factual recall rather than interpretation. Because of this, they require that the novel be fresh in your mind. If you read the book a week or two ahead of a quiz day, be sure to review the book before the quiz. Let me know if you find that a question on a quiz can be interpreted in more than one correct way.
   - If you are absent on a quiz day, you must contact me before the next class to make up the quiz or you will have a zero averaged in your final grade for that portion of the course.

3. **Discussion Questions**
   - Bring one good discussion question for each of the first six reading assignments. A good discussion question invites others to share perspectives, interpretations, reflections, and opinions. It is interpretive rather than factual, thus it doesn't have a right answer or a yes/no answer. It benefits the group because it leads to a full exploration of an issue. It satisfies your curiosity about what other people think. It is written in an invitational way that encourages others to share their thinking. A good discussion is focused and open-ended enough to result in roughly ten minutes of discussion.
   - Each question should be accompanied by a paragraph or two that explains the following: what in the novel or story prompted your question, why do you think it's an important question to ask, how would you answer the question, what in your experience connects with your question. You should also include page numbers so that people can reread sections that apply
Good questions often include quotes from the reading and reference to specific passages or scenes.

- Please prepare real questions. Focus on issues and topics you want to think about, particularly those related to cultural understandings and interactions among people of diverse backgrounds.
- Your questions should be typed. They are due at the end of the class on the day the book is discussed.

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.
   More information will be provided on a separate handout

5. Discussion Panel for a reading selection
   More information will be provided on a separate handout

6. Final Project and Presentation
   More information will be provided on a separate handout

7. Large and Small Group Participation

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 (7-3103).