Course Information: Cultural Diversity in the Literature of the Americas
HU 2520/Spring 2010
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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 does it mean to be American?”

Note that the focus 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 (novels, short stories and films) 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 deeper wisdom and a more nuanced understanding about what American means. The course will also include a few selected readings about racial/cultural diversity.

Some of you might be wondering: what about Finnish American culture? Irish American culture? Polish American culture? My answer has five parts: (1). Because a superficial study of cultural diversity creates stereotypes, there is barely time to in fourteen weeks to begin with three groups. (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) American schools often avoid engagement with racial identity to the detriment of students who often know only their own racial group. (5). 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, and I hope this course provides you with a framework for doing that.

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. 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.

What you can expect to gain from the course
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 posted on Blackboard.

Grade Distribution (all assignments must be completed to pass the course)
- Weekly Quizzes/Reflection Memos 35%
- Context Report 10%
- Panel Discussion 10%
- Final Project and Presentation 35%
- Peer Evaluations 10%

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

Course Policies
The course is enriched by everyone's preparation, attendance, and full participation. Thus, the following policies are in effect throughout this course

- **Absence policy**
  More than 3 absences will lower your final grade. The limit of 3 absences includes both excused and unexcused, so think of this policy as a sick-leave policy. If you are sick, particularly if you have flu symptoms, stay home and take care of yourself. **Send me an email to let me know what's going on.** If you are traveling for a Michigan Tech sport, let me know your status and anticipated absences. If you are traveling for a special family or work occasion, let me know that. Otherwise, come to class. If I do not receive an email, I'll assume you are engaging in behavior that detracts from your success. Regardless of the reason for your absences, you are expected to make up the work you missed, including missed quizzes. **Whenever possible, missed quizzes must be made up before the next class period.**

- **Electronic Device policy**
  Cell phones, computers, and other electronic devices distract from the work of the class. They compete for your attention and they distract the people near you. Be sure to turn them off and put them away before class begins. When there is an extenuating circumstance that requires the use of a device, such as a time when everyone is taking notes or a time when you are presenting, then personal computers are permitted. If you have a need for an adaptive device, please let me know after class.

- **Academic Integrity policy**
  Some class assignments call for research. In oral presentations and in written reports, **document all of your sources.** Do this in parentheses after each direct or indirect use of every source. At the end of the presentation or report, provide me with a list of all the sources you used. Be especially attentive to the quality, credibility, and trustworthiness of all your sources.

- **Participation policy**
  Complete the reading on time; mark significant passages in your books; review the book before class; bring the book to class; ask other people what they think; listen with respect; speak from your experience and with reference to the readings; share what you think; allow others to think differently.
Course Assignments/Course Work

1. Reading Quizzes
   - The reading/film quizzes are intended to promote timely and careful reading and viewing. 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 reading or film be fresh in your mind. If you read the assignment well ahead of a quiz day, be sure to review right 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. You are responsible for following up on this. Missed quizzes count as 0%.

2. Reflection Memos
   - Bring a one-page (typed) reflection memo for the readings scheduled on Jan. 14, Jan. 26, and Feb. 16. Your memos will form the basis of class discussion. These memos are an opportunity to practice the reflective, interpretive, critical, and creative thinking that success in this class requires.

   In contrast to the quizzes, which focus on factual information, the memos should focus on interpretive issues. They should be thoughtful, explorative, creative, personal, invitational. The memo should be addressed to the class as a group and it should focus on issues, perspectives, themes, and characters, tensions in the novel.

   Below are a few suggested prompts that you can use to get started, or you can create your own entry point.

   a. What is my personal response to this reading? What has the reading left me thinking or wondering about? What in the reading triggers my response? What in my experience triggers my response? What do I learn about myself and the culture I take for granted by thinking about this reading? Are people from different cultures likely to share my response? How might their responses differ from mine? What would I like to know about how others respond to this reading?

   b. What perspective does this reading offer about a current social issue or about relationships across cultures? What questions does it raise that are important for us to think about? What does it say about the challenges of interactions among people from different cultural or racial backgrounds? Are the challenges faced by the people in this reading character-forming or character-destroying challenges?

   Grades on Reflection Memos
   - To earn a C, memos must be clear and reflective.
   - To earn a B, memos must be clear, reflective, contain specific references (including page numbers and some direct quotes) to scenes, characters, etc.
   - To earn an A, memos must be clear, reflective, contain specific references, and prompt others to think more deeply about the novel, either in terms of their own experiences, the current social context, the value of this novel to other young adults.

3. Context Reports
   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

4. Discussion Panel
A group leads discussion of one of the novels, beginning Feb. 9 and continuing through the term. More detail on separate handout.

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

6. **Large and Small Group Participation**

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**University Policies**
Academic regulations and procedures are governed by University policy. Academic dishonesty cases will be handled in accordance the University's policies.

If you have a disability that could affect your performance in this class or that requires an accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act, please see me as soon as possible so that we can make appropriate arrangements. The Affirmative Action Office has asked that you be made aware of the following:

Michigan Tech complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. If you have a disability and need a reasonable accommodation for equal access to education or services at Michigan Tech, please call the Dean of Students Office, at 487-2212. For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department head or the Affirmative Action Office, at 487-3310.

Academic Integrity:
http://www.studentaffairs.mtu.edu/dean/judicial/policies/academic_integrity.html

Affirmative Action:
http://www.mtu.edu/aao/

Disability Services:
http://www.mtu.edu/urel/studenthandbook/student_services.html#disability

Equal Opportunity Statement:
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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 12</td>
<td>Course Intro</td>
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<td>Jan. 19</td>
<td>Tatum, &quot;Talking about Race, Learning about Racism&quot; (print pdf file)</td>
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<td>Jan. 21</td>
<td>Viramontes, pp. 48-90; Context Rpts. Begin</td>
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<td>Jan. 26</td>
<td>Viramontes, 93-180; Context Rpt.; Reflection Memo Due</td>
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<td>Jan. 28</td>
<td>Fox, &quot;Insider's Guide: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity&quot; (print pdf file)</td>
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<td>Feb. 4</td>
<td>Winter Carnival Recess</td>
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<td>Feb. 16</td>
<td>Alexie, <em>Flight</em>, pp. 1-106; Reflection Memo Due</td>
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<td>Feb. 23</td>
<td>Alexie, &quot;Indian Education&quot; pp. 171; &quot;The Lone Ranger&quot; pp. 181; &quot;Somebody Kept Saying&quot; pp. 199; &quot;Witnesses&quot; pp. 211</td>
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<td>Feb. 25</td>
<td>Alexie, &quot;The Only Traffic Signal&quot; pp. 43; &quot;This is What it Means to Say&quot; pp. 59</td>
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<td>March 2</td>
<td>begin screening of <em>Smoke Signals</em></td>
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<td>March 4</td>
<td><em>Smoke Signals</em> screening continues</td>
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<td>March 16</td>
<td>Talking Leaves; King &quot;A Seat in the Garden&quot; pp. 184; Sears &quot;Dancer&quot; pp. 250; Roberts &quot;It's All in How You Say It&quot; pp. 229</td>
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<td>March 18</td>
<td>Screening of Gates; <em>African American Lives</em></td>
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<td>March 23</td>
<td>Talking Leaves, &quot;Erdrich, &quot;The Bingo Van&quot; pp. 82; Hogan &quot;Aunt Moon's&quot; pp. 147</td>
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<td>March 30</td>
<td><em>Crossing</em>, McPherson, &quot;A Loaf of Bread&quot; pp. 81</td>
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<td>April 1</td>
<td>Screening of <em>Beauty Shop</em></td>
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<td>April 6</td>
<td><em>Crossing</em>, Walker, &quot;Advancing Luna—and Ida B. Wells,&quot; pp. 120; Grooms, &quot;Food that Please, Food to Take Home,&quot; pp. 133 (Last day for panels and context reports) screening of PBS, &quot;The Murder of Emmett Till&quot;</td>
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<td>April 13</td>
<td>Final Presentations</td>
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