

AM 103: INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN STUDIES

Fall 2009

Professor Joshua C. Woodfork

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Course Meeting:

Tuesday and Thursday 12:40 – 2:00 pm, Tisch Learning Center (TLC) 303

Office Hours:

TLC 305A

Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:30-3:30 pm, Wednesday by appointment, and other days by appointment. I am usually available before and after class. Since people frequently “drop by” during office hours, I recommend scheduling an appointment with me in advance of your office visit.

Course Description:

Introduction to the interdisciplinary study of American culture, past and present. Emphasizes reading critically, thinking historically, practicing interdisciplinarity, and acknowledging diversity. Students will analyze and synthesize multiple kinds of primary sources (such as fiction, film, music, art) and disciplinary perspectives (sociology, economics, media criticism) to appreciate better the complexity of American life and culture. (This section fulfills the college requirement in expository writing.)

This semester:

To study American culture, this semester's version of the *Introduction to American Studies* class explores adoption. Beginning with U.S. adoption's modern historical roots, adoption serves as the extended case study. Considering notions of family, students probe the law, history, public policy, ethics, gender, race, class, and parenting, while examining transracial, gay, domestic, international, and private versus public adoption.

Course Objectives:

- To introduce American Studies
- To foster knowledge about U.S. society and culture
- To engage with concepts of diversity
- To probe notions of family
- To cultivate critical thinking skills
- To develop skills in written and oral communication

Texts:

All of the texts are available for purchase at the Skidmore Shop and are also placed in the Open Course Reserves on the first floor of the Scriber Library.

- 1) Pertman, Adam. Adoption Nation: How the Adoption Revolution Is Transforming America. Basic Books, 2000. ISBN: 978046505614
- 2) Wegar, Katarina, ed. Adoptive Families in a Diverse Society. ISBN: 9780813538426
- 3) Wolff, Jana. Secret Thoughts of an Adoptive Mother. Vista Communications, 2000/1997. ISBN: 9780967214319

Attendance:

Regular attendance is required. Students are responsible for work missed during absences. Three absences are permitted, but not encouraged. **Students missing more than three classes will have their final grade lowered.** 5 points will be deducted from the final grade for each day missed after three absences (so if you have an 80 in the class your grade will be lowered to a 75). According to the *Student Academic Handbook* and the *Faculty Advisor Handbook*, "any students who miss more than a third of the [class] sessions may expect to be barred from the final examination. In such cases, the course grade will be recorded as F."

Students are expected to arrive on time to class. Tardiness will not be permitted. **Two late arrivals** will count as one absence.

Special note on H1N1 (swine) Flu: Accommodations (including making up work and exceptions to the attendance policy) will be made for students who experience the flu during this semester. If you are sick, please do not come to class. Consult Skidmore's website for more information on dealing with the flu:

<http://cms.skidmore.edu/pandemic/>

The Skidmore Honor Code and Statement:

Because the College functions as a tightly integrated community of curricular and co-curricular experiences, a strict allegiance to its standards of conduct is essential for every student's well-being and intellectual growth. Students should make certain they understand the high value we place on honesty, cooperation, and consideration and the penalties the College imposes for infractions in these areas. Skidmore not only promotes intellectual honesty vigorously but severely punishes such offenses as plagiarism and cheating on exams.

The Honor Code Commission requires students to write on their tests and exams the following statement:

"WHILE TAKING THIS EXAMINATION, I HAVE NOT WITNESSED ANY WRONGDOING, NOR HAVE I PERSONALLY VIOLATED ANY CONDITIONS OF THE SKIDMORE COLLEGE HONOR CODE."

Academic Integrity:

Any of the following acts, when committed by a student in any academic exercise, will not be tolerated and shall constitute academic dishonesty:

- *Plagiarism*: intentionally or knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as one's own, including direct quotation, paraphrase, or borrowed facts or information
- *Cheating*: intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids
- *Falsification*: intentional and unauthorized falsification or fabrication of any information or citation
- *Facilitating Academic Dishonesty*: intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another to violate any provision of this Code.
- *Other Forms of Academic Dishonesty*: multiple submission, forgery, sabotage, or alteration will not be tolerated.

When completing your writing assignments, please consult the "Academic Integrity Checklist" and the *Skidmore Guide to Writing* (both available online). All questions regarding academic integrity should be directed to the instructor. Academic dishonesty has serious consequences and may result in failure of the assignment, failure of the course, referral to the Integrity Board, probation, suspension, or dismissal.

Disability Accommodations:

If you are a student with a disability, please bring me your semester memo of accommodations as soon as you obtain it. If you think that you need accommodations but do not yet have them, set up a meeting with the Coordinator for Students with Disabilities in the Office of Student Academic Services, located in Starbuck Center. It is the student's responsibility to follow up with the instructor regarding all accommodations that require his participation. To ensure full use of testing accommodations the student is advised to speak with the instructor at least 7 days before any test or examination date listed on the syllabus.

Use of Electronic Devices:

Please turn-off all cellular telephones, pagers, and other electronic devices during class meetings. If you must have your device turned on, please switch it to vibrate or silent. Text messaging during class is unacceptable.

Laptop Computers:

If you wish to use your laptop computer during class meetings, please a) email the instructor explaining why, b) sit in the front row during class, and c) agree to use the laptop to take notes or for class discussion and not to engage with the Internet for other computer related activities, such as websurfing, instant messaging, or email.

Assignments and Grading:

Class Participation – Students are expected to participate in class, reflecting their completion of assigned readings. Both quantity and quality of class participation will be considered in grading. As a class we will devise guidelines for classroom discussion. Class participation will be calculated based upon: a) attendance; b) a **three-page** write-up of an external lecture or activity that relates to course themes; c) participation in class discussion; d) in-class writing and exercises; and, if necessary, d) reading quizzes.

Adoption and Popular Culture – Students will select an example of adoption found in popular culture (television, film, literature, etc). In the body of the **five-page** essay, students should critique the adoption example, placing it in larger contexts. (September 29)

Midterm Examination (October 20)

Adding to the Adoption Syllabus – Students will research and compose a proposal for adding another text to our course. This proposal should take the form of a **five-page** essay where students explain why this text should be included and how its inclusion could extend and/or challenge course themes, arguments, and assumptions. (November 10)

Research Prospectus – In consultation with the instructor, students will select a research prospectus topic early in the semester. Students will define their research topic, review it, and propose a plan to complete the project. Prospectuses must focus on some aspect of adoption. Sample topics will be discussed in class. The prospectus is a research project that requires students to use interdisciplinary American Studies research methods in producing their written effort. Primary and secondary sources must be consulted and properly referenced in the prospectus. Other elements include a working title, thesis statement, outline, and an annotated bibliography. Students will share their research prospectus topics. More information regarding this particular assignment will be distributed in class. (December 3)

Papers are due at the beginning of class on the assigned day. PLEASE NOTE that late papers will not be accepted and a grade of zero will be recorded.

Class Participation	20%	
Adoption and Popular Culture Paper	10%	September 29 th
Midterm Examination	20%	October 20 th
Adding to the Adoption Syllabus	20%	November 10 th
Research Prospectus	30%	December 3 rd

Course Readings: (subject to change)

Readings are due on the date listed. *=Assignment Due.

- Sept. 10 Class Introduction
- Sept. 15 Elsa Barkley Brown, "African-American Women's Quilting: A Framework for Conceptualizing and Teaching African-American Women's History," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 14.4 (Summer 1989): 921-929. (Library Electronic Reserve)
 Danzy Senna, "Triad," in Mixed: An Anthology of Short Fiction of the Multiracial Experience, ed. Chandra Prasad. W.W. Norton and Co., 2006: 309-324. (Handout)
- Sept. 17 Michael Cowan, "American Studies: An Overview," in Encyclopedia of American Studies, ed. George T. Kurian. Grolier Educational, 2001: 105-112. (Handout)
 Richard P. Horowitz, "American Studies: Approaches and Concepts" in Encyclopedia of American Studies, ed. George T. Kurian. Grolier Educational, 2001: 112-118. (Handout)
- Sept. 22 Jay Mechling, "An American Culture Grid, with Texts." American Studies International 27.1 (April 1989): 2-12. (Handout)
 Richard P. Horowitz, "Introduction," The American Studies Anthology, ed. Richard P. Horowitz. Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001: xvii-xxxi. (Handout) <http://myweb.uiowa.edu/rhorwitz/rootsas.htm>
 Lynn Weber and Heather Dillaway, ed., "Introduction" and "A Love Story," from Understanding Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality: Case Studies. McGraw-Hill, 2002: 1-19. (Handout)
- Sept. 24 E. Wayne Carp, "Introduction: A Historical Overview of American Adoption," in Adoption in America: Historical Perspectives, ed. E. Wayne Carp. University of Michigan Press, 2002: 1-26. (Library Electronic Reserve)
 Ellen Herman, "The Adoption History Project" website: <http://www.uoregon.edu/~adoption/>
- Sept. 29 ***Adoption and Popular Culture Paper Due**
- Oct. 1 Adam Pertman, Adoption Nation: How the Adoption Revolution Is Transforming America: ix-67.
- Oct. 6 Pertman, Adoption Nation: 68-171.
- Oct. 8 Pertman, Adoption Nation: 172-206.
- Oct. 13 Pertman, Adoption Nation: 209-312.

- Oct. 15 Career Services Guest Speaker, Penny Loretto, Office of Career Services
- Oct. 20 ***Midterm Examination**
- Oct. 22 Katarina Wegar, ed. Adoptive Families in a Diverse Society: 1-42.
- Oct. 27 Wegar, ed. Adoptive Families in a Diverse Society: 43-128.
- Oct. 29 Wegar, ed. Adoptive Families in a Diverse Society: 129-174.
- Nov. 3 Wegar, ed. Adoptive Families in a Diverse Society: 177-274.
- Nov. 5 Screen: Living on the Fault Line: Where Race and Family Meet, dir. Jeff Farber (2007).
- Nov. 10 ***Adding to the Adoption Syllabus Assignment Due**
- Nov. 12 Jana Wolff, Secret Thoughts of an Adoptive Mother: 17-61.
- Nov. 17 Wolff, Secret Thoughts of an Adoptive Mother: 63-163.
- Nov. 19 Henry L. Tischler, ed. "Is Transracial Adoption Cultural Genocide?" in Debating Points: Race and Ethnic Relations. Upper Saddle, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000: 62-64.
 Leora Neal, "The Case against Transracial Adoption": 65-69.
 Randall Kennedy, "Orphans of Separatism: The Painful Politics of Transracial Adoption": 70-76. (Handout)
- Nov. 24 Screen: Daddy and Papa, dir. Johnny Symons (2006).
- Nov. 26 **NO CLASS** – Thanksgiving
- Dec. 1 ***Reflective Essay Due**
 Dan Savage, "The Enemy Within," in One Big Happy Family, ed. Rebecca Walker. Riverhead Books, 2009: 29-36. (Library Electronic Reserve)
 Antonio Caya, "Daddy Donoring," in One Big Happy Family, ed. Rebecca Walker. Riverhead Books, 2009: 97-107. (Library Electronic Reserve)
 Barbara Melosh, "Adoption Stories: Autobiographical Narrative and the Politics of Identity," in Adoption in America: Historical

Perspectives, ed. E. Wayne Carp. University of Michigan Press, 2002: 218-245. (Library Electronic Reserve)

Dec. 3 ***Research Prospectus Due**

Dec. 8 Ellen Herman, "Epilogue: Reckoning with Risk," Kinship By Design: A History of Adoption in the Modern United States. University of Chicago Press, 2008: 285-299. (Library Electronic Reserve)

 ZZ Packer, "The Look," in One Big Happy Family, ed. Rebecca Walker. Riverhead Books, 2009: 73-78. (Library Electronic Reserve)

 Min Jin Lee, "Like Family," in One Big Happy Family, ed. Rebecca Walker. Riverhead Books, 2009: 79-96. (Library Electronic Reserve)

 Jenny Block, "And Then We Were Poly," in One Big Happy Family, ed. Rebecca Walker. Riverhead Books, 2009: 1-16. (Library Electronic Reserve)

Dec. 10 Toni Morrison, "Recitatif" in Ancestral House: The Black Short Story in the Americas and Europe, ed. Charles H. Rowell. Westview Press, 1995: 422-436. (Library Electronic Reserve)