

DIVERSITY IN THE UNITED STATES
Fall 2008, Skidmore College

Professor: Winston Grady-Willis
Times: W/F 12:20-1:40pm
Location: Tisch 304
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Office: Tisch 328
Hours: W 4:00-7:00pm
T/Th by appointment
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Course Description and Objectives

This course will examine the ways in which people in the United States attempt to reconcile the realities of cultural difference with preconceived notions of a unified USA and a singular “American” identity. Students will learn about the United States as a complex, heterogeneous society that has been shaped profoundly by both the connections and conflicts implicit in its multicultural heritage. Students will also address the interrelationships and tensions that characterize a culturally and socioeconomically diverse society by examining how accepted cultural traditions intersect with contested themes such as race, gender, sexuality, and class. Through lecture-discussions, readings, films and two review essays, students will meet the following objectives: gain knowledge about US society and culture; understand the concepts of diversity, intersectionality, multiculturalism, privilege and social justice; evaluate contemporary and historical US notions of individual and group identity; examine ways in which groups have responded to mainstream social institutions; and develop skills in written and oral communication. Throughout the course students will be placed at the center of the learning experience and attempts will be made to establish meaningful dialogue. A cornerstone of this dialogue is that it will take place within the context of a safe intellectual space for all students that allows for development of critical thinking skills, close interrogation of texts, and posing difficult questions.

Required Texts

Julia Alvarez, *Once Upon a Quinceañera: Coming of Age in the USA*

Jennifer Finney Boylan, *She's Not There: A Life in Two Genders*

Victoria Chang, *Circle*

Beverly Daniel Tatum, *“Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: A Black Psychologist Explains the Development of Racial Identity*

Robert H. Woodrum, *“Everybody Was Black Down There”: Race and Industrial Change in the Alabama Coalfields*

Each book should be available for purchase at the Skidmore Shop by 15 September. Every effort also will be made to have the texts available on reserve in the Lucy Scribner Library. Students can expect occasional handouts and other supplementary assignments throughout the semester.

Evaluation

- 1) Class preparation, discussion, performance on quizzes, and attendance at specific outside-class events of relevance to the course, will constitute **25** percent of each student's grade.
- 2) Performance on the midterm and final examinations will constitute a combined **45** percent of the grade, with the midterm comprising 20 percent and the final examination 25 percent. Each exam will be a combination of short answer and extended essay questions.

- 3) One seven-page book review essay—on either *Once Upon a Quinceañera* or *She's Not There*—will constitute **15** percent of the class grade.
- 4) One seven-page comparative film review essay—on *Mi Familia* and a film of the student's choosing—will constitute **15** percent of the class grade.

Attendance

Although attendance is extremely important, there may be instances when absences are unavoidable. Nevertheless, students with more than two unexcused absences from class sessions will receive a *one-half letter-grade* deduction for the course. An effort will be made to conduct roll at the beginning of each class session. A student not present 10 minutes after class has begun will be considered late. Being late three times constitutes one absence.

Class Meetings

Most classes will be conducted according to a lecture-discussion format. For that reason, it is very important that students prepare themselves by reading the necessary material before coming to a given class session. Stimulating class discussions result from informed participation. Food is not permitted during class time. Cellular telephones should be turned off or silenced prior to the start of each class session. (If this poses a problem, however, please notify the professor prior to a given class.) Text messaging during class time is unacceptable. Students using laptop computers to take notes should not engage in other computer related activities, such as Web-surfing, instant messaging or email. Any student considered to be disrespectful or disruptive during a given class session will forfeit their right to remain in class that day. In turn, however, it is the obligation of the professor to be respectful, prepared, organized, and punctual. If a student has concerns about the conduct or performance of the professor, they should express those concerns to Professor Gregory Pfitzer, chair of the Department of American Studies.

Disability and Accessibility Accommodations

Students with disabilities should provide their semester memorandum of accommodations to me as soon as possible. Those students who do not have accommodations, but who believe that they may be in need of them, should arrange a meeting with Mr. Jamin Totino, Coordinator for Students with Disabilities, in the Office of Student Academic Services, located in the Starbuck Center (580-8150). Students should speak with the professor one week prior to any given exam date to ensure full use of testing accommodations.

Academic Integrity

Students should uphold the Skidmore Honor System and the policies outlined in the *Student Handbook* and *Student Academic Handbook* regarding academic integrity. As noted in the 2008-2009 Skidmore Course Catalog: "Skidmore not only promotes intellectual honesty vigorously but responds severely to such offenses as plagiarism and cheating on exams. Any Honor Code violation may affect the student's graduate school or transfer recommendations and the student's eligibility for academic prizes and awards, for Dean's List or graduation honors, and for membership in Skidmore or national honor societies." (For a full discussion, see http://www.skidmore.edu/catalog/200809/academic_standards_and_review1.htm#the_honor_code.)

COURSE SCHEDULE (Always Subject to Revision!)

FOUNDINGS

- September 3 - **Introducing the Course and Syllabus**
- September 5 - **Triple Heritage(s) of the Early US**
- September 10 - **Race, Class and Gender: the Politics of the Civil War**
Begin Alvarez

IDENTITY

- September 12 - **Personal Identity**
Alvarez, first half
Tatum, Parts I and II
- September 17 - **Group Identity**
Alvarez, second half
Tatum, Part IV
- September 19 - **Politics of Identity I**
Tatum, Part III
- September 24 - **Politics of Identity II**
Tatum, Part IV
Begin Boylan

PRIVILEGE AND POWER

- September 26 - **Defining Terms**
Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,"
in *Peace and Freedom* (July/August 1989): 10-12
Tim Wise, "Privilege," in *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*: 15-60
- October 1 - **Campus Combustion**
Small Group/Large Group Exercise
- October 3 - **Open Date**
- October 8 - **Personal Trajectories I**
Boylan, Parts I-II
- October 10 - **Personal Trajectories II [REVIEW ESSAY DUE!]**
Boylan, Parts III-IV

October 15 - **Review and Reflection**

October 17 - **MIDTERM EXAMINATION**

MAKING CONNECTIONS

October 22 - **Intersectionality**
Chang, Parts One and Two
bell hooks, "Feminism: A Transformational Politic," in *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*: 19-27

October 24 - **The Personal As/Is Transnational**
Chang, Part Three

October 29 - **The Family As/Is Transnational I**
Film: *Mi Familia*

October 31 - **The Family As/Is Transnational II**
Film: *Mi Familia*

November 5 - **A Presidential Election**

November 7 - **Open Date**

BREAD, BUTTER AND RACE

November 12 - **Industrial Work in the Deep South**
Woodrum, Preface-Chapter 2

November 14 - **Labor Organizing**
Woodrum, Chapters 3-5

November 19 - **Impact of Globalization**
Woodrum, Chapter 6-Conclusion

THE ECLECTIC

November 21 - **Hip Hop Moments**

December 3 - **"Millennials"**

December 10 - **Review and Reflection**

December 17 - **Final Examination**
9am-noon