

SPRING 2008 (MW 2:30-3:45)

AMERICAN STUDIES 301. THE AMERICAN CHARACTER

Instructor: Allan Axelrad. Office: UH 409 (278-3625). Office Hours: MW 4:00-5:00, Tu 1:30-3:30.

REQUIRED TEXTS (carried by Little Professor Text Books – 725 N. Placentia Ave., Fullerton).

Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America*

Clifton Taulbert, *When We Were Colored*

Barbara Myerhoff, *Number Our Days*

Linda Furiya, *Bento Box in the Heartland: My Japanese Girlhood in Whitebread America*

Julia Alvarez, *Once Upon a Quinceañera*.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

There will be an essay exam on each unit. The exams on Unit One and Unit Two will each count 33% of your grade. The exam on Unit Three will count 34% of your grade. Grades will not be plus/minus.

It is important that you come to class and take good notes. It also is important that you keep up with the reading assignments and bring the book that we are discussing to class. There may be an occasional pop quiz on the day's reading assignment.

It is generally unacceptable to leave class early. If you must leave class early because of an appointment that cannot be missed, make sure that you tell me before class begins. Cell phones must be on silent. No text messaging permitted during class. Surfing the internet is not permitted in class, either.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Like all American Studies classes, this class is intended to enhance your understanding of the workings of American culture and your ability to think critically and write clearly. Additionally, this class has these particular objectives for all students: (1) to reflect on what it means to be a social being; (2) to understand that culture is socially constructed and fundamental to social interaction; (3) to recognize and evaluate how one's own cultural history affects one's sense of self and relationship to others; (4) to understand the origins, workings, and ramifications of social and cultural change in our own society; (5) to understand the distinctiveness of a social science approach and to appreciate the benefits of an interdisciplinary approach in studying broad, unifying themes in the social sciences; (6) to relate the social sciences to significant social problems in the past and present; (7) to understand the role that cultural diversity plays in defining what it means to be a social being; (8) to appreciate the complexities of gender, ethnicity, and class in social and cultural analysis; (9) and to understand that because we live in an interconnected world, we need to understand diversity and relationships within and among cultures and subcultures.

COURSE CHRONOLOGY

Jan. 23 – Introduction.

UNIT ONE: THE DOMINANT CULTURE

Jan. 28 – From the tradition-directed to the inner-directed and individualism.

Jan. 30 – Lystra, *Searching the Heart*.

Introduction.

Ch.1. The “Pen is the Tongue of the Absent”: Reading and Writing
Nineteenth-Century Love Letters.

Ch. 2. Falling in Love: Individualism and the Romantic Self.

Feb. 4 – Lystra, *Searching the Heart*.

Ch. 3. “Lie Still and Think of the Empire”: Sexuality in Victorian Courtship and
Marriage.

Ch. 4. Secrecy, Sin, and Sexual enticement: The Integration of Public and Private Worlds

Feb. 6 – Lystra, *Searching the Heart*.

Ch. 5. Blurring Separate Spheres: Sex-Role Boundaries and Behavior.

Feb. 11 – Lystra, *Searching the Heart*.

Ch. 6. Testing Romantic Love: Victorian Courtship Rituals and the Dramas of Private
Life.

Ch. 8. Not for God Only: Patriarchy, Religion, and Romantic Love.

Feb. 13 – Romantic Love in the late 20th Century: “When Harry Met Sally” (film).

Feb. 20 – “When Harry Met Sally” (film).

Feb. 25 – Bowling alone: conformity and individualism in the 20th century.

Feb. 27 – Examination on Unit One (bring a blue book).

UNIT TWO: SUBCULTURAL COMMUNITIES

Mar. 3 – The Social Construction of Race.

AFRICAN AMERICANS

Mar. 5 – Taulbert, *When We Were Colored*.

Introduction.

Ch. One. Poppa, Black Buddha of the South.

Ch. Two. Long Brown Stockings and Colored Debutantes.

Ch. Three. Colored People, Just Passing Time.

Ch. Four. Luggage, Legs and Gorgeous Colored Women.

Ch. Five. Fear, and Hope: Childhood Memories.

Mar. 10 – Taulbert, *When We Were Colored*.

Ch. Six. The Ice Man.

Ch. Seven. Colored Politics in a Small Southern Town.

Ch. Eight. Some Glad Morning, Some Glad Day, I'll Fly Away.

Ch. Nine. The End of a Season.

Ch. Ten. All In a Day's Work.

Ch. Eleven. Dreams, Trains and Other Things.

Mar. 12 – “Once Upon A Time When We Were Colored” (film).

Mar. 17 – “Once Upon A Time When We Were Colored” (film).

WHITE ETHNIC AMERICANS

Mar. 19 – Myerhoff, *Number Our Days*.

Foreword.

Ch. 1. “So what do you want from us here?”

Ch. 2. Needle and thread: the life and death of a tailor.

Mar. 24 – Myerhoff, *Number Our Days*.

Ch. 3. “We don't wrap herring in a printed page.”

Ch. 4. “For an educated man, he could learn a few things.”

“Number Our Days” (film).

Ch. 5. “We fight to keep warm.”

Mar. 26 – Myerhoff, *Number Our Days*.

Ch. 6. Teach us to number our days.

Ch. 7. “Jewish comes up in you from the roots.

Epilogue.

Afterword.

April 7 – Examination on Unit Two (bring a blue book).

UNIT THREE: FAMILIES: TRADITION & ADAPTATION

DOMINANT CULTURE/SUBCULTURES

April 9 – “What’s Cooking” (film).

Apr. 14 – "What’s Cooking" (film).

JAPANESE AMERICANS

Apr. 16 – Furiya, *Bento Box in the Heartland*..

Ch. 1. Swallowing Fish Bones.

Ch. 2. The Fish Head Soup Deal.

Ch. 3. The Hungry Past.

Ch. 4. The Sleepover.

Ch. 5. The Green Cooler and Wasabi.

Ch. 6. Character Building.

Ch. 7. Motherland.

Apr. 21 – Furiya, *Bento Box in the Heartland*.

Ch. 8. Family.

Ch. 9. Eating Pie in Tam’s Kitchen .

Ch. 10. Mom’s Write Hand.

Ch. 11. A Taste of the Big Apple.

Ch. 12. The War Bride’s Husband.

Ch. 13. At the Heart of a Black Walnut.

Ch. 14. Savoring Memories.

VIETNAMESE AMERICANS

Apr. 23 – “Green Dragon” (film).

Apr. 28 – “Green Dragon” (film).

HISPANIC AMERICANS

Apr. 30 – Alvarez, *Once Upon a Quinceañera*, pp. 1-98.

May 5 – Alvarez, *Once Upon a Quinceañera*, pp. 98-173.

May 7 – Alvarez, *Once Upon a Quinceañera*, pp. 173-269.

May 14 -- Final Exam: 2:30-4:20 (bring a blue book).

If you would like to be notified of your semester grade, bring a self-addressed, stamped envelope or postcard to the final exam (grades will not be reported over the phone or by email).

