

Fall 2014 AML 2410: Topics in American Literature and Culture

Section 3698: Utopian Dreams: The American Dream in Crisis

Instructor: Keasha Renee Worthen (reneeworthen@ufl.edu)

Schedule and Location: M/W/F at 6th period in Matherly Hall, room 108

Office Hours and Location: Friday, 4th – 5th period, Turlington Hall room 4307

Course Description:

What does it mean to be American? What does the American Dream mean to you? These are the two main questions we will explore throughout the semester. Some scholars and critics suggest that the American Dream is the ethos of America. This course will engage, interrogate, and examine that ethos, and we will do it by looking at how history (in the form of literature, poetry, plays and essays) has conceptualized American identity as well as by examining how it is being defined in the 21st century. Since this is an introductory course on the concept of identity within a national context, we will spend the majority of the semester examining what other writers and critics have had to say about the ethos of America, how that ethos represents the American Dream, and how questions of access, acceptance, as well as national, familial, and individual responsibility and identity affect how the American Dream, and by extension the American citizen/identity, is defined.

This class is divided into units. Unit one will examine essays on the concept of the American Dream, its origins, and its problems. Unit 2 will examine the concept of the American Dream through the lens of literature and literary works. Here we critically examine what literary writers have had to say about the accessibility and functionality of the American Dream for various groups of people. The third unit will focus on your individual ideas about the American Dream. This unit will prepare for writing your own essay.

In this class, participation and attendance is mandatory. By the end of the semester, you will have to come to a conclusion about what you think the American Dream should be.

Required Texts:

1. Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1988. Print.
2. Morrison, Toni. *Song of Solomon*. New York: Knopf, 1977. Print.
3. Naqvi, H. M. *Home Boy : A Novel*. 1st ed. ed. New York: Shaye Areheart Books, 2009.
4. Portis, Charles. *True Grit*. New York: New American Library, 1969. Print.
5. Thompson, Hunter S. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, and Other American Stories*. New York: Modern Library, 1996. Print.
6. Vonnegut, Kurt. *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater: Or, Pearls Before Swine*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965. Print.

B to B-: You did what the assignment asked of you at a good quality level. Work in this range has one major flaw or several minor ones, but is reasonably well-argued and well-organized, and may have minor mechanical problems.

C to C-: You did what the assignment asked of you at an adequate quality level. Work in this range meets the basic requirements of the assignment, but has serious problems with clarity, organization, argumentation, and/or mechanics.

D to D-: You did what the assignment asked of you at a poor quality level. Work in this range shows a sincere effort to meet the requirements of the assignment, but suffers from multiple major problems with clarity, argumentation, organization and/or mechanics.

E: You didn't do what the assignment asked of you. Work in this range shows no effort or an insincere effort to meet the requirements of the assignment. An F grade will also be given for work not submitted, late work (unless a sufficient excuse is provided), and plagiarized work.

Grade equivalencies

A	93-100
A-	90-93
B+	87-90
B	83-87
B-	80-83
C+	77-80
C	73-77
C-	70-73
D+	67-70
D	63-67
D-	60-63
E	60 or below

Note on Grades: All grades are non-negotiable. However, if you are not satisfied with your final grade, you can file an appeal by filling out a form available from Program Assistant Carla Blount in the English Department office. **Note that a grade appeal may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade**

Composition (C) and Humanities (H) Credit:

This course can satisfy the UF General Education requirement for Composition or Humanities. For more information, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/general-education-requirement.aspx>

Writing Requirement (Formerly Gordon Rule)

This course can provide 6000 words toward fulfillment of the UF requirement for writing. For more information, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/gordon.aspx>

You must pass this course with a grade of C or better to receive credit for the 6,000-word University Writing Requirement (E6). You must turn in all papers to receive credit for writing 6,000 words. A grade of C or better satisfies the University's General Education Composition (C) requirement. You must pass

with a grade of C or better if this course is to satisfy the CLAS requirement of a second course in Composition (C). If you are not in CLAS, check the catalog or with your advisor to see if your college has other writing requirements.

Preparation

You are expected to be prepared for every class, including completing all reading and writing assignments on time. Papers and drafts are due at the beginning of class. Extensions can be negotiated in advance of deadline; **late papers will not be accepted**. Encrypted files and blank/empty files will not be accepted. Failure of technology is not an excuse.

Mode of Submission

All papers must be in 12-point Times New Roman or Calibri font and double-spaced. All papers will be submitted via Sakai.

Attendance: Because AML2410 is based on student discussion and participation, excessive absenteeism will not be tolerated. You are allowed to miss three class sessions. **If you miss more than six classes, you will fail the entire course.** As required by university and department regulations, if you must miss class for a university-sponsored sports, band or theater event, I will excuse your absence. However, in such cases, you must contact me **ahead of time** and make up any missed work. Prolonged absences of two weeks or more will not be tolerated, even for medical reasons, as discussion of reading and writing assignments is a key part of the learning experience in this course. If you must miss a class period, it is your responsibility to contact a classmate (not me) to find out what you missed, including what was discussed that day and what work was assigned.

Punctuality: You must arrive to class on time. You will only be excused for lateness one time; after that, each late arrival will count as an absence. If you are more than 15 minutes late for class, you will be marked absent. Being tardy three times (5 – 10 minutes late) will result in one absence

Classroom behavior: Distracting and disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. Such behavior includes but is not limited to: talking while others are talking; sleeping; sending text messages; doing homework for this or any other class; and reading anything except the text we are discussing. You may use your laptop computer to take notes, but not for any other purpose. Please turn off your cell phone or, if you must leave it on, then set it to “silent” or “vibrate”. Because of the nature of this course, it is highly convenient to bring a laptop to class and work; however, if I find even one student on Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, or any social media site, laptops will be banned.

Statement on harassment: UF provides an educational and working environment for its students, faculty, and staff that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/studentguide/studentconductcode.php#s4041> Because this course requires much contact, collaboration, and dialogue among students, it is essential that each student work to create an environment of respect and tolerance.

Statement on academic honesty: All students are required to abide by the Student Honor Code. For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, see:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. All assignments will be subject to a plagiarism checker. Furthermore, students are not to work with other students on quizzes.

Statement on grade point equivalencies: UF has recently instituted minus grades. As a result, letter grades now have different grade point equivalencies. For more information, see:

<http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/regulationgrades.html>.

Conferences: I encourage you to schedule appointments to see me, especially when you have questions about an assignment, need help with a particular writing problem, want extra feedback on a draft, or have questions about my comments on your work. Of course, we can also correspond via e-mail.

Course Schedule (Schedule is subject to change)

Unit 1: Essays on the American Dream

Week 1 (8/25 – 8/29)

- Monday: Course Introductions and Unit Overview
- Wednesday: “Student Debt and the Crushing of the American Dream” - Joseph E. Stiglitz, *NYT* (Sakai)
- Friday: “From the People, by the People, to the People: The American Dream(s) Debut” – Demetri Lallas (Sakai)
 - Reading Response 1

Week 2 (9/1 – 9/5)

- Monday: "Globals" and the American Dream: A Survey of Student Aspirations in an American Studies Course” – Robert C. Hauhart and Jeff Birkenstein (Sakai)
- Wednesday: “The American Dream as the Cultural Expression of North American Identity” - Diana ŞTIULIUC (Sakai)
- Friday: Discussion
 - Reading Response 2

Week 3 (9/8 – 9/12)

- Monday: **Holiday**
- Wednesday: “Myth and the American Dream” – Jordan Y. Miller
- Friday: – Discussion
 - Reading Response 3

Unit 2: The American Dream in Literature

Week 4: (9/15 – 9/19)

- Monday: *The American Dream* – Edward Albee (Sakai)
- Wednesday: *The Great God Brown* – Eugene O’Neil
 - Link: <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks04/0400091h.html>
- Friday: Discussion

- Reading Response 4

Week 5 (9/22 – 9/26)

- Monday: *The Day of the Locust* – Nathaniel West
- Wednesday: *The Day of the Locust* – Nathaniel West
- Friday: Discussion
 - Assignment: Essay 1 Due

Week 6 (9/29 – 10/3)

- Monday: *A Cool Million* – Nathaniel West
- Wednesday: *A Cool Million* – Nathaniel West
- Friday: Discussion
 - Reading Response 5

Week 7 (10/6 – 10/10)

- Monday: *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* – Kurt Vonnegut
- Wednesday: *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* – Kurt Vonnegut
- Friday: Discussion
 - Reading Response 6

Week 8 (10/13 – 10/17)

- Monday: *Songs of Solomon* – Toni Morrison
- Wednesday: *Songs of Solomon* – Toni Morrison
- Friday: **Homecoming**
 - Reading Response 7

Week 9 (10/20 – 10/24)

- Monday: *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*– Hunter S. Thompson
- Wednesday: *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*– Hunter S. Thompson
- Friday: Discussion

Week 10 (10/27 – 10/31)

- Monday: *The House on Mango Street* – Sandra Cisneros
- Wednesday: *The House on Mango Street* – Sandra Cisneros
- Friday: Discussion
 - Reading Response 8

Week 11 (11/3 – 11/7)

- Monday: *True Grit* – Charles Portis
- Wednesday: *True Grit* – Charles Portis
- Friday: Discussion
 - Reading Response 9

Week 12 (11/10 – 11/14)

- Monday: *Homeboy* – H.M. Naqvi
- Wednesday: *Homeboy* – H.M. Naqvi
- Friday: Discussion
 - Reading Response 10
 - Essay 2 Due

Unit 3: Your American Dream

Week 13 (11/17 – 11/21)

- Monday: Final Project Introduction
- Wednesday: Individualizing the American Dream: Lecture
- Friday: My Presentation

Week 14 (11/24 – 11/28)

- Monday: **No Class**
- Wednesday: **Thanksgiving Break – No Class**
- Friday: **Thanksgiving Break – No Class**

Week 15 (12/1 – 12/5) Final Project

- Monday:
- Wednesday: Conferences
- Friday: Presentations

Week 16 (12/8 – 12/10) Final Essay

- Monday: Presentations
- Wednesday: Presentations
 - Essay Due by 5pm.