

HUMA 3342: SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IDENTITIES

Syllabus

M/W 5:30-6:45pm

Room: JO 3.906

Contact Information:

Instructor: Terje Saar-Hambazaza, PhD

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Office: JO 5.109

Office hours: Mondays 6:45-7:45 and by appointment

Course Description:

This course focuses on identity formation in American society and examines the ways in which we construct various social and cultural identities. From crusading Batman to fierce Katniss Everdeen of *The Hunger Games* to pop star Beyoncé and the 44th president Barack Obama, various cultural and political icons have influenced our society's perception of various identities. We will explore personal and collective, national and global expressions of identities, including ethnic, racial, gender, class, and transnational identities. How do identities work? What different factors affect the problem of social and cultural identities? How are identities formed, performed, adapted, expressed, revealed to others, manipulated, guarded, transformed, or even lost? How and why do they survive? What impact do personal identities have on the collective expression of identities? How are they expressed in various written, oral, and visual texts? How have these texts affected our perception of American identity? We will explore answers to these questions by familiarizing ourselves with theories of identity construction and analyze different cultural texts, including works of literature by James Weldon Johnson, Jhumpa Lahiri, Sandra Cisneros, Louise Erdrich, and Suzanne Collins, films like *Do the Right Thing*, and *Citizen Kane*, television programs, contemporary popular music, advertising, and visual arts.

Literary Studies Student Learning Objectives:

Interpretative Skills - Students will be able to describe and apply basic methodologies of interpreting literary texts;

Communicative Ability - Students will demonstrate effective written and oral communication skills;

Knowledge Base - Students will demonstrate a broad knowledge of major periods and genres of literature

Learning Outcomes for HUMA 3342:

Students will be able to demonstrate an in-depth understanding of a range of concepts of identity in American culture.

Students will be able to analyze identity formation and multiple identity expressions.

Students will be able to apply theories of identity formation in human behavior.

Students will be able to analyze identity formation in various cultural texts.
Students will be able to comprehend and appreciate the differences between their own identities and that of the others.

Required Texts:

Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street* (ISBN: 978-0679734772)
Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games* (book 1) (ISBN: 978-8184771695)
F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (Scribner), ISBN: 978-0743273565
James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (ISBN: 978-0679727538)
Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies* (Mariner Books, ISBN: 9780395927205)
Nella Larsen, *Passing* (Penguin Classics), ISBN: 978-0142437278
Frank Miller, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (DC Comics), ISBN: 978-1563893421
Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (New Directions, ISBN: 978-0811216029)
Music charts top 10 (the current list of Billboard/iTunes Top 10)
Films: *Do the Right Thing*, *Citizen Kane*
Selection of articles posted on Blackboard/eLearning (as PDF):
 Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" (PDF)
 Louise Erdrich, "The Red Convertible" (PDF)
 Selection from Kath Woodward, ed. *Questioning Identity: Gender, Class, Nation* (PDF)
 Self, Media, and Consumer Culture (PDF)

Course Requirements and Policies:

Attendance & Participation Policy

Attendance is absolutely crucial to your success in this course. I encourage you to come to every class meeting; otherwise, you will miss a great deal of information and material you need to succeed in this course. Therefore, there are no excused absences (emergencies will be considered on a case by case basis). Each student is allowed two (2) missed classes, no questions asked. Save them for when you really need them. More than two absences will adversely affect your grade. Your success in this course is a function of your level of engagement. I am interested in the quality of your remarks rather than the quantity. Hence, your thoughtful, attentive, and active participation is essential. If you sleep, engage in non-class-related activities, or interfere with your classmates' ability to learn you will be counted absent for that day. Be on time - class will start promptly. Leaving early will count as an absence. Participation in this course does not include doing work unrelated to this course during class, sleeping in class, or using computers or other personal electronic devices for personal messaging, research, or entertainment.

Late Work

I do not accept late work or schedule makeup exams.

Personal Communication Devices

I do not allow the use of electronic devices in class. Turn off all cell phones and other personal communication devices before the start of class and do not use them during class.

Academic Integrity

The faculty expects from its students a high level of responsibility and academic honesty. Because the value of an academic degree depends upon the absolute integrity of the work

done by the student for that degree, it is imperative that students demonstrate a high standard of individual honor in their scholastic work. As a general rule, scholastic dishonesty involves one of the following acts: cheating, plagiarism, collusion and/or falsifying academic records. Students suspected of academic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary proceedings. Plagiarism, especially from the web, from portions of papers for other classes, and from any other source is unacceptable and will be dealt with under the university's policy on plagiarism (see general catalog for details).

Course Assignments:

Writing Assignment #1 (10%)

Writing assignment #2 (20%)

Examination #1 (30%)

Final Examination #2 (30%)

Attendance (5%)

Participation (5%)

Details on Writing Assignments:

Writing assignment #1: Self-narrative paper

This assignment invites you to think about who you are and what identity traits are relevant to you as an individual.

When writing your narrative, consider the following: the narrative self presented in an autobiography presumes that identity is visible, accessible, and transparent. How do we see our own story? What events, people etc. have influenced our lives? What are we willing to reveal to others about ourselves? How transparent can we be? How do we achieve this level of transparency? How do our multiple identities become visible through our narratives? Finally: how do these identities affect in the way in which we read others' narratives? Does it matter? Why or why not?

Writing assignment #2: a 5-page formal textual analysis paper

Select a cultural text and analyze its representation of multiple identities. Observe the way it influences our understanding of gender, race, ethnicity, class, or sexuality. Describe the cultural space where it is located in. Explain its function: who is the intended audience? Who might be excluded as an audience? How does it respond to various other cultural and social identities? What images does it reinforce? You must utilize at least two secondary sources in your paper.

NOTE: This syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Theorizing Identity: Social and Cultural Identities

Monday, January 13: Introduction

Wednesday, January 15: Woodward, *Questioning Identity: Gender, Class, Nation* (PDF)

Monday, January 20: NO CLASS: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

PART I: Family and Gender

Feminine Identities:

Wednesday, January 22: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" (PDF),

Louise Erdrich, "The Red Convertible" (PDF);

Monday, January 27: Nella Larsen, *Passing*;

Masculine Identities:

Wednesday, January 29: Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Monday, February 3: *A Streetcar Named Desire*, cont.; film clips: *The Godfather*

Wednesday, February 5: Television: Gender identities & historical TV

Monday, February 10: Television: Contemporary TV & gender roles

Wednesday, February 12: Analysis: Gender & TV

PART II: Race and Ethnicity

Hidden or Lost Identities:

Monday, February 17: James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, chapters 1-8

Wednesday, February 19: *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, chapters 9-end

Monday, February 24: Examination #1

Multicultural Spaces, Multicultural Identities:

Wednesday, February 26: Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*

Monday, March 3: Film: Spike Lee, *Do the Right Thing*; Self-narrative paper DUE;

Wednesday, March 5: Film and analysis: *Do the Right Thing*

March 10-15: NO CLASSES: Spring break

Monday, March 17: Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies*

Wednesday, March 19: *Interpreter of Maladies*

PART III: Morality and Class

Public Self and Class Identities:

Monday, March 24: Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

Wednesday, March 26: *The Great Gatsby*, cont.; Film: *Citizen Kane*

Monday, March 31: Film: *Citizen Kane*

Wednesday, April 2: Analysis: *Citizen Kane*

PART IV: Culture and the Material Self

Popular Culture and Consumer Identities:

Monday, April 7: Billboard and iTunes charts

Wednesday, April 9: Self, Media, and Consumer Culture (PDF)

Monday, April 14: Self, Media, and Consumer Culture (PDF)

PART V: Violence and Imagined Identities

Dystopian Spaces, Dystopian Identities:

Wednesday, April 16: Collins, *The Hunger Games*

Monday, April 21: *The Hunger Games*, cont.

Wednesday, April 23: Frank Miller, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, Books 1-2

Monday, April 28: *Batman*, Books 3-4; Conclusion and review

CONCLUSION: Who Am I?

Wednesday, April 30: Final examination

Wednesday, May 7: Writing assignment #2 DUE;