

AMS/ANT 235.01: Anthropology of American Cultures (Spring 2005)
TUES 10-11:50 and THURS 10-10:50
Steiner 107

Prof. K. Gibel Azoulay Tel. 4324
ARH 121 Office Hours:

Drop Ins: TTh 2-4 -- Fridays 11-3:00.

Appointment (Sign-up sheet posted weekly)

Course Description: To be read and referred to periodically

We live in a time and a place in which values and attitudes shape and are shaped by consumerism and (re)presented as popular culture. The aim of this course is to examine, in order to disrupt, "naturalized" ideas behind the meaning of what is called "*mainstream*" or "*dominant*" American culture. We will explore issues and themes which shape what and how we think of American culture(s). Specifically, we will focus on issues which cumulatively -- and subtly -- inform national conversations and narratives about American culture and citizenship, democracy, political participation, class consciousness and the power of media to shape social attitudes, values, lifestyles and political opinions. These topics are highly charged by attitudinal shifts towards *race*, *class*, *gender* -- intersecting social positions -- as well as religion and religiosity and constitute the central themes in this course. They frame the national political culture of the U.S. and ground the historical perspective in the texts (readings and films) which we will be using to guide our discussion.

In the mid-1980s, debates emerged over theories, methods and most of all, ethnography -- the end product of an anthropological project which focused on the politics of representation. Increasingly, many anthropologists turned away from the idea of discrete groups to look at the socio-political and economic contexts in which communities were situated as well as how these contexts inform and are informed by the cultivation of collective (local and national) identities. Some of the questions which motivated new research projects include: Who and What gets represented or ignored, by whom, for what purpose and with what rhetorical strategies? What criteria are used to demarcate population groups and why? When is a topic newsworthy and the recipient of widespread coverage? What research projects are funded and recognized as valuable? In other words, what makes something visible for examination? And how do initial research questions shape the data, interpretations and conclusions of research projects? Finally, what are the historical contexts and conditions which generate certain questions and narratives and silence or dismiss others? These questions motivate the themes and analyses taken up by the authors and film-makers whose texts constitute the material of the semester.

Class Format

Classes will begin with introductory comments and move into a general discussion of the assigned readings.

1. Each individual student shall come to class -- *with reading notes* -- fully prepared to summarize the key points of the assigned readings and to relate them to previous class discussions.
2. In order to facilitate an informative class discussion, each student shall come prepared to discuss specific passages in the assigned reading -- keep in mind: *what did you learn? why is the new information or perspective significant? are there implications applicable to current events?*

Students are required to keep a reading journal [see below]. Discussion of assigned films will usually be integrated into class discussion and you should keep up with relevant current events. (This is best done by

subscribing to a daily newspaper, listening to NPR once a day or watching the evening news).

Course Requirements

This course aims to sharpen skills of critical reading and thinking in order to isolate and evaluate methods used to elicit the information presented in a text as well as the ideas and interpretations which the authors present. This course does not include any exams -- however extensive writing and active participation in class discussion are expected and will be graded. (Weekly journal entries will be graded after Spring Break -- this gives you time to get used to writing thoughtful entries). In order to facilitate this process, students will be expected to adhere to the following requirements:

1. **Attendance is mandatory.** There is an automatic credit for attendance. Therefore, students who miss more than three classes will receive an automatic reduction in the final grade. If you are absent, you are responsible for finding out what you missed. Five absences will be considered a withdrawal (WF) from the course. Class begins on time -- if anyone has scheduling conflicts which will cause tardiness, please discuss this with me at the beginning of the semester.

Thurs 11:00-11:50 If there is no convocation, *Thursday class will sometimes extend to 11:50. Feature films to be seen will be shown on a series of Sundays at 2:10. If you cannot make this time, you are responsible for seeing the film on your own before Tues' class. Plan in advance! As they are announced, there may be several convocations or afternoon lectures which you will be required to attend. You should therefore keep 11:00 free.*

We will see several related commercial films and documentaries. These films are supplementary texts which will often dramatize events and processes we read about. In addition to providing visual representations of aspects of "American culture", you will consider the various messages which seem to be explicitly and/or subtly conveyed to different audiences.

Films scheduled for Sundays at 2:10 – if you are unable to attend a scheduled film, you are responsible for making arrangements to see it on your own before the following Tuesday class.

2. **Reading Journal (35%).** Every student must keep a reading journal. The dated entries represent a conversation with the text, the author and class discussions. All entries should include comments on what you learned? what opinions or preconceptions did you have and did they change? how? was the author's presentation convincing? why? why not? are there points of identity between your life experience and what you found? how does the representation contribute to a sense of "Americanness?" You may choose any writing style(s) with which you feel comfortable. The journals are to be typed and an entry should be made at least once a week. You will be expected to write at least 3 pages per reading assignment [minimum 6 pages a week].

-- JOURNAL ENTRIES ARE TO BE **DATED AND PAGINATED CONSECUTIVELY.** Journal entries are due in my office each Friday no later than 4:30pm. Your ideas will not be graded as correct or incorrect -- rather this is an opportunity to bracket "opinions" and explore new "ideas." I will be evaluating the *cumulative quality of the content* of your entries.

-- There is an automatic extension for journals: Saturday 11am -- but then they must be turned in to my home mailbox at 1405 Broad Street. -- There are no other extensions!!

3. **Active Participation in Class Discussions (20%):** Class discussion represents an exchange of ideas -- it is a conversation among peers. In addition to individual responsibility for class discussions, each week, different groups of students will be assigned to address questions raised in the readings and to comment on them.

Shared perspectives as well as differences of opinion further our own understanding of a topic. Critical thinking and an engaging exchange of ideas depends on listening carefully to another person's perspective and responding respectfully. The focus should be specifically on what and why there are points of agreement or disagreement -- how is one interpretation different and in what ways should it be valued as more or less persuasive? Personal experience is important, but you may draw on it as an additional resource -- not a substitute -- for evidence from the texts we will be reading. In other words, your arguments need to be situated within the context of the readings. These may be supplemented with outside sources.

4. **Leading Class Discussion (20%):** A group of 3-4 students will discuss the reading assignment. The group will address the following questions:

what are the main points? How do they compliment the goals set out in the introduction to the book? what is the significance to the author's project? What is the logic behind the author's discussion? What should we remember from the chapters and why? How does the reading relate to previous readings? events in the news? Each group is responsible for presenting their ideas to the class, reporting on their preparatory discussion, and commenting on specific passages before raising them for class discussion.

5. **Evaluation Paper (25%):** A 5-6 (maximum 8 pages) paper summarizing what you have learned throughout the semester about this entity commonly referred to as *American culture* including its relevance in your own life experiences and body of knowledge.

This is not a soul-searching exercise – it is an opportunity to review the semester: your journal entries, films & documentaries as well as supplementary material (hand-outs, news etc). Reflect on the information and analyses which you have encountered in this course. and evaluate their significance to the lived experiences which shape your understanding of *Americanness* (themes may include immigration & assimilation; the formation of class consciousness or other group-based collective identity; socializing values in school, church or home; urbanization & suburbanization, shopping at malls, insights from cultural events such as museums, theater, television, involvement in the political process etc.).

Your evaluation paper and journal entries are due on Wednesday May 18 by 5pm -- without exception. Do NOT reprint your journal essays. SUBMIT ALL THE MATERIAL *INSIDE A STAMPED, SELF-ADDRESSED ENVELOPE!* Envelopes should be placed in box outside ARH 121

TEXTS for AMS/ANT 235

THE RACIAL ODYSSEY OF ASSIMILATION

Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998)

RACE, CLASS AND PRIVILEGE

Kirby Moss, *The Color of Class: Poor Whites and the Paradox of Privilege* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003)

COMMODIFIED ETHNICITIES

Dávila, Arlene, *Latinos Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People* (University of California Press, 2001)

ACQUIRING A TASTE FOR *THINGS*

Zukin, Sharon, *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture* (Routledge, 2004)

ALTERNATIVE POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES

Angela D. Dillard, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner Now? Multicultural Conservatism in America*. (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

**** READINGS BELOW ARE FOR CLASS DISCUSSION AS LISTED BY DATES BELOW (*AND INCLUDE READING FOOTNOTES!*)**

Films for AMS/ANT (in chronological order) [you may want to mark these on your personal calender]

WEEK#1**Tues: 25 Jan**

Introduction: Collection of Lopez' Outlines;
Distribution of Syllabi

T *Documentary In Class -- Race: Power of an Illusion, Part 2 (60 min)*

Thurs: 27 Jan

T *Documentary In Class -- Race: the Power of an Illusion Part 3*

Read & submit outline for M.F. Jacobson *Whiteness of a Different Color*
ix-x Note on Usage
Introduction: The Fabrication of Race

The Formation of Generic Whiteness - the vocabulary of *ethnicity* has erased the *racial* transformation of immigrants from Europe in the 19th and early 20th century. How does excavating archaic ways of seeing *racess* shed light on current attitudes towards race and citizenship on the one hand, and whiteness and privilege on the other hand? What is the political history of *whiteness*? What is the relationship between *perception* and *conception*? What are the socio-political, legislative, economic and cultural processes which radically alter ways of thinking and seeing?

WEEK #2**Tues 1 Feb**

Jacobson pp. 13-90

Chapt 1 (1790-1840 the racial logic of citizenship)

Chapt 2 (1840-1924: Anglos-Saxons and the discourse of immigration restriction versus the discourse of naturalization)

Thurs 3 Feb

Jacobson pp. 91-135

Chapt 3 (from white to Caucasian; from alien to citizen)

WEEK #3

-- 6 Feb Sunday 2:10 pm Gentlemen's Agreement

Tues 8 Feb

Jacobson pp. 137-170

Chapt 4 (an archaeology of 1877: race as conceptual and perceptual categories)

WED: PBS 8pm Slavery & the Making of America

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/about/index.html>

Thurs 10 Feb

Jacobson pp. 171-199

WEEK #4

-- 13 Feb Sunday 2:10pm Vendetta

Tues 15 Feb

Jacobson pp. 201-245

Chapt 6 (imperialism and the transformation of racial lines into color lines)

Chapt 7 (the legal construction of whiteness)

WED: PBS 8pm *Slavery & the Making of America*
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/about/index.html>

Thurs 17 Feb

Jacobson pp. 246-280

Chapt 8 (the homogenization and consolidation of whiteness and the emergence of a discourse on “race relations”).

Epilogue: the legacy of racialism in American political culture

< *Documentary: The Angry Eye*

WEEK # 5

20 Feb Sunday 2:10 -- Oh Brother Where Art Thou

Project Muse database: Supplementary Set of Reading Assignments for class discussion on Thurs (24/2): (Select “pdf file” to print)

. Hugh Ruppersburg. “‘Oh, so many statements...’ History, Race and Myth in O Brother, Where Art Thou?” *Southern Cultures* 4,4 (2003), 5-26.

. Benjamin Filene. “O Brother, What Next?: Making Sense of the Folk Fad.” *Southern Cultures* 10, 2 (2004), 50-69.

. Dora Appel, “On Looking: Lynching Photographs and Legacies of Lynching after 9/11.” *American Quarterly* 55, 3 (2003), 457-478.

Tues 22 Feb

< *Documentary: Strange Fruit*

< *Documentary: The Murder of Emmett Till*

Thurs 24 Feb

Discussion of Articles on Project Muse

WEEK #6

The Color of Class: How does poverty depreciate the value of Whiteness? how do poor Whites move in and out of social categories? How does the experience of poverty inform Whiteness as a conflicted racial and class identity? What is the relationship between social class privilege and racial privilege? How are low-income and marginalized Whites associated with Whiteness? How is Whiteness represented through images of geography and isolation?

Tues 1 March

Moss 1-72

Thurs 3 March

Moss 73-124

WEEK #7

The landscapes of consumption – Why is shopping pleasurable? what drives consumer culture? What are the processes involved in creating a shopping culture? What role do businesses, media, marketing research, consumers play in defining, cultivating, nurturing, diffusing and extinguishing desire for things? How has shopping changed American culture? Shaped ideas about class distinction and difference? How do we learn what to buy? Where to buy? And what defines prices as reasonable or outrageous?

-- 6 March Sunday 2:10 - Documentary: People Like Us

Tues 8 March

Zukin 1-88

Thurs 10 March

Zukin 89-168

WEEK #8

Tues 15 March

Zukin 169-226

Thurs 17 March

Zukin 227-278

In Class: Frontline documentary: The Merchants of Cool.

(Note: you are responsible for reviewing the program's teacher guide website at:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/teach/cool/>

SPRING BREAK -- 19 March - 4 April

WEEK #9

***Latinos Inc:* How do Hispanic marketers produce creations against the dominant white Anglo-Protestant ideal that is devoid of blacks, Latinos and other “ethnics.”? What technologies are used to quantify and measure attitudes of particular populations? How are populations demarcated as consumers and how are generalizing conventions about people’s *culture* packaged and marketed? How do marketing strategies, as a preeminent channel of influence in the public sphere, create pervasive images of race, ethnicity, class, gender? What is the relationship between cultural visibility and cultural citizenship? How do the diversities ensuing from transnationalism and the flow of people and commodities create new demands for establishing “belonging?” How the production of commercial mass-mediated culture shape notions of belonging and citizenship?**

You are responsible for viewing 20 minutes of the Spanish station on tv – check Mediacom for the channel and time. Recommended: find a fellow student who is conversation Spanish to watch with you (this is an activity best done in a group; take notes on the physical appearance of the people you see and the scenes in which they appear as well as any commercials: i.e. what images are projected to viewers? Notes should be turned in with your journal on Fri)

Tues 5 April

Dávila . pp. 1-87

Thurs 7 April

Dávila. pp. 88-152

WEEK #10

Tues 12 April

Dávila pp. 153-215

Thurs 14 April

Dávila pp. 216-240

WEEK #11**Tues 19 April**

roundtable summation of Dávila and general discussion of material to date.

Thurs 21 April

Documentary: Matters of Race, Part 3 "We're Still Here."

See website: <http://www.pbs.org/mattersofrace/index.shtml>

WEEK #12**24 April -- Sunday Film *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner***

Multicultural Conservatism – how did the discourse of equality and justice that emerged from the civil rights movement open the door to political participation in conservative movements for men and women of color, white women, and homosexuals? How does the notion of cultural authenticity inform political identities? Is there a contradiction between opposition to affirmative action and cultivating diversity within the political Right?

Tues 26 April

Dillard Preface, Intro (pp1-24), Chapt 1 (24-55)

Thurs 28 April

Chapt 2 (pp56-98)

WEEK #13**Tues 3 May**

Dillard Chpt 3 (99-136)

Thurs 5 May

Dillard Chpt 4 (137-170)

WEEK #14**Tues 10 May**

Dillard Conclusion (171-182)

Thurs 12 May

Documentary: Sidney Poitier

gathering loose ends and bringing closure

REMINDER: Evaluation paper, and journal entries are due on Wednesday, May 18, by 5pm -- without exception. Do NOT reprint your journal essays. SUBMIT ALL THE MATERIAL INSIDE A STAMPED, SELF-ADDRESSED ENVELOPE!