

American Studies 301  
American Character  
Spring 2013  
M 4:00-6:45 (10072)  
University Hall 250

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### **Required Reading**

Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (2008)

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

George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (1993)

Moustafa Bayoumi, *How Does It Feel To Be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America* (2008)

Welcome to American Studies 301! The four books are available at the Little Professor Book Center, 725 N. Placentia Avenue, Fullerton, just east of campus. Inexpensive used copies of each are available online.

Though I'll lecture from time to time, this class will be largely devoted to our discussions of the assigned readings. It is essential that you do this reading as it is assigned and that you attend class consistently. I will be very happy to meet with you in my office or to have e-mail conversations with you. When it's necessary to communicate with the entire class outside of our class meeting time, I'll do so through TITANium. I'll also post important documents (such as this syllabus) on the class TITANium site.

### **Written Work**

I may occasionally make *brief written assignments* of no more than a few paragraphs, either to be done in class when assigned or to be due at the next meeting. I won't grade these, but I will record your participation. The purpose of these assignments is to enhance our discussions of the readings.

On **Monday, March 25**, there will be an **examination in class**. It will consist of a few short questions, each requiring either a very brief essay or perhaps just a single sentence in response, as well as one or two questions that will require one essay or two essays, totaling around 1,000 words, in response.

On **Monday, April 29**, you must submit ***an ethnography*** that examines a place with which you were not already familiar at the beginning of the semester. “Ethnography” is a word for a description and explanation of the culture of a specific place: the beliefs, symbols, and values that appear to be in force in some particular location such as a workplace, commercial establishment, church, nightclub, etc. I’ll be happy to consult with you on the selection of your location, but you don’t need to secure my approval. Should you happen to need a letter of introduction to the place you choose, for you to assure its residents, customers, etc., that you’re conducting research, I’ll gladly provide that. The ethnography must be at least at least 1,500 words long. If you think that some additional reading would enhance the work, by all means do some, but it’s fine with me if your entire research for the project is your visit to the place you’re studying.

The ***final examination*** will be held on **Wednesday, May 22**, from 5:00-6:50 p.m. It will encompass the entire course and will require the writing of either one essay of at least 1,500 words or two or three essays, approximately equal in length, which together total at least 1,500 words.

You may take a *make-up exam* only for a serious and documented reason.

The exams, like the course itself, are designed to help you develop your own viewpoints, not simply to repeat the views of the authors or the professor.

In cooperation with the Office of Disabled Student Services, I will make the necessary accommodations for **student disabilities**.

## **Grading**

On the midterm exam, I will be concerned with the directness and accuracy of your briefer answers, and your demonstrated grasp of the course’s basic assumptions, concepts, and purposes. My grading criteria for the long midterm essay(s) and for the final exam essay are: understanding, originality, use of evidence, clarity of expression, and organization of ideas. I will explain these criteria thoroughly in class.

I use the university’s plus-minus grading system. An A for me is a symbolic way of saying that I think your work is genuinely superior, far in excess of my minimum expectations. B is for work that is very good, definitely exceeding my minimum expectations. C is for acceptable work

that meets my minimum expectations. D is for work that does not meet those expectations but that has some promise or potential for doing so. An F is for work that falls far below my minimum expectations, perhaps including (as discussed below) my expectation that work will be prepared honestly.

In determining your course grade, I will first count your final exam grade as 40% and the grades on the midterm and the ethnography as 30% each. In determining your grade in the course: If your exam grades have consistently improved over the semester, I will give you some extra credit. If you have failed to turn in any of the brief written assignments, I will lower your course grade, up to a full letter. Participation in our class discussions will raise your course grade up to a full letter.

You will be graded solely on the quality of your own work in this class, not in competition with other people. I have no quotas, and I do not use a grading curve.

**Academic dishonesty** is an extremely serious matter: either the presentation of assigned written work actually done by someone else, without attribution, as if it were one's own work; or else the preparation of assigned written work for a classmate. Penalty for such deceit will range, depending on my judgment of the severity of the offense, from a failing grade on a particular assignment to failure in the course. An even more severe penalty might result should I decide to report an instance of dishonesty to the Dean of Students Office.

### **American Studies 301 in the CSUF General Education Program**

This class is part of the university's general education program, a structured group of courses designed to give you a broad range of knowledge and skills beyond the much more specialized focus of your particular major. I believe that general education courses are at the very heart of a university education. If the general education program works as it should, you will be a more thoughtful, interesting, and versatile person because of your GE courses. I have arranged to teach at least one GE course in every semester (now numbering nearly 80) that I have been at Cal State Fullerton, and have taken tremendous pleasure from the diversity of students that a GE course attracts.

Most of you are taking this class to meet the specific general education requirement for a course in " Explorations in Social Sciences." Additionally, this is a class designated to meet the general education requirement for a course in cultural diversity. Like all American Studies

classes, this one is intended to enhance your understanding of the workings of American culture and your ability to think critically and express yourself clearly in writing and speech. Additionally, because of the GE categories it satisfies, the class has these particular "learning goals" for all students:

### **Explorations in Social Sciences (3 units minimum)**

Because courses in subarea D.5 build upon the learning goals in D.1, completion of

subarea D.1 shall be required as a prerequisite for all courses in D.5. In addition, students completing courses in subarea D.5 shall

a. Examine problems, issues, and themes in the social sciences in greater depth; in a variety of cultural, historical, and geographical contexts; and from different disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives.

b. Analyze and critically evaluate the application of social science concepts and theories to particular historical, contemporary, and future problems or themes, such as economic and environmental sustainability, globalization, poverty, and social justice.

c. Analyze and critically evaluate constructs of cultural differentiation, including ethnicity, gender, race, class, and sexual orientation, and their effects on the individual and society.

d. Apply theories and concepts from the social sciences to address historical, contemporary and future problems confronting communities at different geographical scales, from local to global.

### **Cultural Diversity (3 units minimum)**

Courses that satisfy the Cultural Diversity requirement must include all of the following learning goals and in addition be approved GE courses in subareas C.3 (Explorations in the Arts and Humanities), D.5 (Explorations in the Social Sciences), or Area E (Lifelong Learning and Self-Development). Students completing courses in Area Z shall

1. Demonstrate understanding that culture is socially constructed and fundamental to social interaction.

2. Demonstrate appreciation of the complex relationships that various factors such as gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, religion, and class bring to a discussion of society and culture.

3. Demonstrate understanding that because we live in an interconnected world, we need to understand the diversity and relationships within and among cultures.

4. Recognize and evaluate how one's cultural history affects one's sense of self and relationship to others.

Courses in General Education that meet these learning goals will be identified by a star (\*) in appropriate publications.

## **COURSE OUTLINE**

This is a course about what it has meant, and what it means today, to be an American. At its heart this course is about the cultural diversity found in American society, but the course also explores what unites us as Americans. We'll concentrate on how and how much Americans have learned to identify themselves as members of distinct social classes and as members of racial or ethnic groups.

**M 1/28**      What Are We Doing Here and Why Are We Doing It?

### **I. IS THERE AN AMERICAN CHARACTER? UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN AMERICAN SOCIETY**

**Culture as a Shared System of Meaning: Basic Concepts in the Course and in the Discipline of American Studies**

### **II. AMERICA'S IGNORED DIVISION? BARRIERS OF SOCIAL CLASS**

**M/2/4**      **Just Visiting: Barbara Ehrenreich's Stint as a Minimum-Wage Worker**  
**read:** Ehrenreich, "Introduction: Getting Ready," Chapter One, "Serving in Florida," pp. 1-49. Chapter Two, "Scrubbing in Maine," pp. 51-119.

**M 2/11**      Chapter Three, "Selling in Minnesota," "Evaluation," pp. 121-221.

**M 2/18**      Presidents' Day: No Class Meeting

### **III. MAKING RACE: LEARNING TO BE WHITE PEOPLE**

**M 2/25**      **The Power of Color and the Color of Power: The "Political History of Whiteness" in the United States**  
**read:** Jacobson, Introduction & Chapter 1, pp. 1-38. Chapters 2 & 3, pp. 39-135.

**M 3/4**      **Seeing "The Other": Race as an Issue of Perception**  
**read:** Chapter 4, p. 139-170; Chapter 5, pp. 171-199.

- M 3/11**     **Shades of White: Challenging White Dominance**  
**read:** Chapters 6 & 7, pp. 201-245; Chapter 8 & Epilogue,  
pp. 246-280.
- M 3/18**     In-Class Review for the Midterm
- M 3/25**     **Midterm examination**

### **Spring Recess**

#### **IV. ALIENS IN THEIR OWN LAND: MEANINGS OF BEING MEXICAN IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA**

##### **On Being Brown in LA**

- M4/8**     What border? A discussion;  
**read:** Sánchez, Introduction through Chapter 3, pp.  
3-83.
- M 4/15**     Sánchez, Chapters 4 & 5, pp. 87-125; Chapters 6 & 7, pp.  
129-170; Chapters 8 & 9, pp. 171-206;
- M 4/22**     Sánchez, Chapters 10 & 11, pp. 209-252; Chapter 12 &  
Conclusion, pp. 253-274.

#### **V. DIVERSITY AND IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICA**

##### **To Be Young and Arab in the U.S. Today**

- M 4/29\***     September 11, 2001: When Everything Changed?  
**\*Ethnography Due in Class on Monday, April 29**
- M 5/ 6**     **read:** Bayoumi, pp. 1-114.
- M 5/13**     Bayoumi, pp. 117-270.  
**Course Evaluations and Conclusions**

**Final Examination: Thursday, December 15, 2:30-4:20 pm.**