Instructor: Professor Cunningham
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Course Description:
What is the American dream? Ask a dozen people and you will likely receive a wide variety of responses: political and religious freedom, the right to free speech, limitless economic possibilities, the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Studying any one of these themes alone could easily fill a course, let alone a six-week session, and we will likely touch on many of them. Yet as 236 is in the diversity track, our main focus will be on ethnic American groups who historically and/or currently have had a different perspective on and often more limited access to the American dream. The course will focus on literature by those Americans who have had to struggle to be recognized as Americans by the population at large and even by themselves at times. Who qualifies as an American and do all Americans receive equal treatment politically, legally, culturally? What happens to those who have to fight for recognition? These questions will be among our focal points in a session divided into three main sections where we will read texts by and about 1) Chinese Americans, 2) Native Americans, and 3) African Americans. In addition to looking at literary texts, we will also screen several films, documentaries, recorded interviews and film clips related to the authors and themes of the course. These films are an integral part of the course and will be discussed as thoroughly as the written texts.

Required Texts:
Sherman Alexie—The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven
Frank Chin—Donald Duk
April Sinclair—Coffee Will Make You Black

Course pack readings from Amy Ling, Maxine Hong Kinston, Gus Lee, Amy Tan, David Henry Hwang, Louise Erdrich, Leslie Marmon Silko, Mary Crow Dog, Connie May Fowler, Langston Hughes, Tone Cade Bambara, Alice Walker, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, and others.

Course Requirements and Grade Breakdown:

25% PowerPoint Presentation
To help gain a more in-depth understanding of the texts we’ll be reading, you will give a half hour presentation on an aspect of the text that requires more extensive background information. For example, there will be presentations on key historical events or figures that arise in the books. Although it is not necessary to know everything about such figures in order to appreciate the writing, understanding the historical and cultural elements that exist within the text will definitely help you gain a better understanding and appreciation for the works we read. The goal of the presentations is thus to explain and explore such critical background information.

25% Class participation/oral discussion
Come to class having completed the assigned readings. Be prepared to participate actively in rigorous discussions about the content and form of what you have read. Read each assignment attentively, writing down thoughts or questions you have in the margins. Also be sure to bring to class a written list of several questions or points of interest you have about each piece—this will help ensure good discussions (and a good participation grade for you).
meetings as discussions in which we all learn from one another. Don’t look to me for “the answers.” Instead, I look forward to listening to your questions, insights and experiences. Please be aware that non-toleratation of other people’s opinions will not be tolerated! :-) Disagreement makes for good discussions, but be respectful of other people’s differences and listen with courtesy. Everyone in the class should feel comfortable voicing opinions and ideas.

25% Reading Quizzes:
The quizzes will test you on the nightly readings. These quizzes will be unannounced, but you should expect a quiz for every reading and prepare accordingly. The quizzes are not designed to trick you, only to test that you have read the material carefully and thoroughly. They will help ensure that you are prepared for class discussions, which will make the class more successful. As long as you have read the texts closely, this part of the grade should be straightforward and easy to maintain. Keep in mind that there are no make up quizzes for absences.

25% Final Essay:
The essay topics will be individualized to fit your own interests. As you read, be on the look out for pieces that are especially interesting to you that you might like to pursue further. Your final will be a formal, research-type paper (with secondary sources) on a topic of your choice that relates to the issues we have discussed in class. You will need to provide literary and critical analysis—not summary. A key goal is to explore the cultural and historical context under which the literature we’ve read is produced. Your paper should show an understanding of the text’s relationship to social attitudes or historical contexts that existed when the text was written. You may choose to further study Alexie or Kingston or read in-depth on the participation of Chinese workers in the transcontinental railroad or the removal of Native American children from their families under the guise of education. The possibilities here are endless. Whichever option you choose, please touch base with me at least two weeks before the paper is due so I can check your progress and give you some feedback and possible suggestions.

Attendance:
Because so much of your total grade in this course depends upon in-class responses, activities and discussions, and participation in lecture and debate, your attendance is absolutely crucial. Your input and presence are what will make the classroom vital. You may miss only one class before it adversely affects your grade. Repeatedly arriving late to class also counts as an absence. You must reserve this absence for a time when you really need it. I will not make decisions about whose excuses sound legitimate and whose don’t, nor allow some people “freebies” and not others. The attendance policy is not negotiable. Please do not ask me to excuse you from class, regardless of the reason. If you know in advance that you will not be in class, it is your responsibility to get the assignments from me or from someone else in the class. If you are absent on a day an assignment is due, you must turn it in early or give it to a classmate to turn in for you. I will not accept late work without penalty. Contact me (or a classmate) to find out what you missed and stay on schedule. Any student who misses more than 1 class will have her/his final grade dropped 1/3 letter grade for each additional absence.

Ethics and Plagiarism:
You have to do your own work and appropriately identify work that is collaborative, borrowed, or copied from other sources, including the Internet. Obviously, when you use graphics, charts, words, citations, or even ideas from other sources, you are under the legal and ethical obligation to identify these sources according to citation norms. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please contact me. Using work that is not yours and not appropriately identifying it will usually result in an F for the course.
Learning Disabilities:
If anyone has a documented physical or learning disability that I should be aware of, please let me know as soon as possible.