

Aesthetics, Values, & Authority:  
*Who's an American Anyway?*  
*America and the Social Question*  
The Honors College, Florida International University  
IDH 3034-U22 (87972)  
Fall 2017 Tuesdays and Thursdays: 2:00-3:15 PM  
August 21 – December 2  
Classroom: AHC 5 212-A & B

**Instructor**

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Office hours: by appointment, DM 295

**Overview**

Since the inception of the United States, the concept of what it means to be an American has been contested. In the last hundred years, various groups that were once excluded from the American mainstream have come to dominate that mainstream. Additionally, the character and adaptation patterns of immigrants has drastically changed since the major influxes of European immigrants during the early part of the last century. What does it mean to be an American in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What are the processes (social, psychological, geo-political) that have created a different type of immigrant experience now from a hundred years ago? Is America a melting pot, or is there a better metaphor to describe how people adapt? To answer these, and many more questions, we will endeavor on an interdisciplinary journey through various fields of the humanities and social sciences.

In the fall semester, we will focus on the experience of immigrants in their own words, through the use of memoirs. Additionally, we'll investigate the meaning of the term, *American*. What does it mean to be one? Is it aligning oneself with a particular view of government? Is there something exceptional and different about Americans? We'll explore various "myths" about the American ethos and its role in immigrant identity development.

**Course Objectives/Outcomes:**

- By the end of this course, students will gain an understanding of the various cognitive filters through which they understand themselves, others, and the interconnected histories of different peoples.
- By the end of this course, students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of the historical complexities of identity development of immigrants.
- By the end of this course, students will be able to articulate a clearer definition of abstract concepts of identity related to nationality and citizenship.
- By the end of this course, students will identify the influence of Western values on how they perceive themselves and others.
- By the end of this course, students will be willing to engage in discussion that includes salient analysis and debate.

**Required Texts**

Hunter, G. 1999. *Immigrant Voices: Twenty-four Narratives on Becoming an American*. New York: Signet Classic | ISBN: 978-0-451-52698-4  
Noah, T. 2016. *Born a Crime: A Memoir*. New York: Perennial | ISBN: 0-06-093052-7

**Required Readings (Professor will provide PDF)**

See Blackboard for readings

### **Attendance/Classroom Etiquette**

While class attendance is not mandatory, this course is **heavily** reliant on student participation and interaction. Failure to attend class on a regular basis will deprive students of the needed context from which to understand the readings and assignments. It is the student's responsibility to check with his/her peers regarding missed work or discussions. It is **not** the responsibility of the professor to repeat lessons or announcements to students who missed class (whatever the reason may be).

There will be no make-up for missed work (no exceptions). Students are responsible for all material presented and all announcements made in class. Students are expected to read all emails sent by the professor and it will be assumed that the student is aware of all material and calendar changes and other messages communicated through email. Do not email the professor asking, "what did I miss?" Such queries do not merit a response.

Students are expected to be engaged in class discussion and interactions; therefore, use of electronic devices of any sort should be limited during class time. Place phone on SILENT (or the OFF button works too). The vibrate function can be just as distracting as the ringer function.

As a responsible adult, students may take calls, etc. but are asked to leave the room while making minimal interruption.

### **Course Assignments**

#### *Reaction Papers (Individual Assignment)*

- In order to demonstrate understanding of the material, there will be three reaction papers that will require you to reflect and react to the readings, lectures, and discussions. The focus must be on analysis of the subject matter not summary.
  - Top papers will have incorporated the various theories and ideas from both the class discussions and assigned readings. Students are welcome to include additional material beyond what is assigned in class.
- All papers must conform to the following regulations: typed, double-spaced, proofread, free of major grammatical errors, front and back printed, and stapled. Please be brief and to the point...**no more than five pages**.

On the top, right-hand corner, include the following information: Full Name, Panther ID, Course & Section, and Course Title.

In the middle, title your paper based on the assignment below:

Reaction Paper #1: What **has** it meant to be an American?

Reaction Paper #2: Immigrant Voices: select three stories

Reaction Paper #3: Born a Crime

#### *Autobiographical Story (Individual Assignment)*

- After having read several memoirs, By the end of this course, students will be asked to write a brief one of their own.

- So, what's your story? What does it mean to be an American to you? Are you the child of immigrants, or are you further down the generational line? How has this impacted your identity?
- Are there any specific instances that have "marked" your life? For better or for worse...
- This assignment should be approached from a literary perspective. Tell the story of your life...well, but not all of it! But tell the story of a significant event or period you lived through.
  - It doesn't necessarily have to pertain to immigration, but it should address issues of identity...who are you?
- All papers must conform to the following regulations: typed, double-spaced, proofread, free of major grammatical errors, front and back printed, and stapled. Please be brief and to the point...**no more than seven pages**.
- The story will be presented to the class during the finals week.
  - By the end of this course, students will be graded on how well they tell their story. Therefore, you can do this however you want. You may just read it, or if, you prefer to be more creative, you may perform it, you may paint it, etc. Basically, you may use any medium to express your ideas.

#### *Bi-weekly Current Affairs Discussion (Team Assignment)*

- Every other week, one team will provide a reading to the class about a current topic in the news. The topic need not be political in nature, though it must be related to the themes of the course.
- The team will prepare an oral summary of the article, but more importantly, provide an analysis as to its importance to our understanding of current issues.
  - In addition, the team will develop five discussion questions to be submitted in writing to the professor the day of the team's discussion. Teams will be assessed not only on the novelty of the topic chosen but also their ability to engage the entire class in discussion, as well as their ability to collaborate with each other. (15 mins for discussion)
- The current politicization of knowledge is making it more difficult to discover the truth in a biased-free manner (or as close to biased-free as we can get). Therefore, I'm limiting the sources from which you may draw your current affairs articles to the following news media outlets:
  - *The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Economist, National Public Radio, The Washington Post, The Atlantic Monthly, BBC News, Marketplace*
  - Notice the omission of all the major cable news channels.

#### *Student-Lead Discussions (Team Assignment)*

- Every other week, one team will prepare a summary and chapter discussion from an assigned reading. Assignments will be decided after the first week of classes.
  - Teams will provide to the professor a **written summary and analysis** of the reading (three-page max). This summary should also include major take-away points (if you forget everything you've read, what were the big main ideas?), implications, agreement or disagreement with the points raised by the author (and why).
  - Teams will lead a class discussion on the chapter and may include a classroom activity. Teams will be assessed not only on the novelty of their presentation of the material but also their ability to engage the entire class in discussion, as well as their ability to collaborate with each other. (40 mins for discussion)

#### *In-Class Activities and Quizzes*

Unscheduled and unannounced. The student must be present to submit.

All written work must consistently adhere to an accepted style of formal writing, i.e. Chicago Manual of Style, MLA, APA, etc. Students are advised to carefully proofread *all* papers before submitting them. Students who need extra help with their writing should make use of the university's free tutoring services: *On-Campus Learning Center*: PC 247; *Online Learning Center*: w3.fiu.edu. All students must adhere to the Academic Integrity Policy of the Honors College and Florida International University.

Assignments are due on the day indicated in this syllabus or as announced by the professor. No late assignments will be permitted. All assignments that are written are to be printed out and turned in during the class meeting on the day it is due. Assignments WILL NOT be accepted via email; DO NOT email papers, unless specifically instructed to do so.

### **Grading Scale**

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	D	F
93	89	85	80	75	70	65	60	55

### **Religious Observances**

Every effort will be made, where feasible and practical, to accommodate students whose religious practices coincide with class requirements or scheduling. Please make sure to notify your instructor *at the beginning of the semester* of which dates you will be absent or any anticipated problems with completing course work.

### **Physical, Mental and Sensory Challenges**

Every effort will be made, where feasible and practical, to accommodate students who are so challenged. Should you require accommodations, contact the Disability Resource Center, if you have not done so already.

### **Academic Misconduct Policy**

Registration in this course implies an acceptance of and compliance with the Honors College policies for students and the FIU Code of Academic Integrity. Please refer to the following documents for additional information:

FIU Code of Academic Integrity: <http://undergrad.fiu.edu/academic-integrity/index.html>

FIU Honors College Plagiarism Policy: <http://honors.fiu.edu/students/policies/#misconduct>

### **Student Portfolios**

The Honors College will be using a portfolio method to assess students' learning outcomes. The portfolio method allows for maximum flexibility in gauging student learning. You will decide (with instructor consultation) what "artifacts" or assignments to include for consideration in your portfolios to demonstrate successful achievement of each of the student learning outcomes.

Portfolios provide a rich context for students to show what they have learned and to explain their learning process. Because the Honors curriculum is meant to be thought provoking and reflective, student self-assessment through portfolios will facilitate learning and provide in-depth assessment.

Each Honors College course includes at least one assignment that could potentially fit portfolio requirements.

### **Global Learning Objectives**

This course has been certified as meeting the university's Global Learning requirement. The course's major assignment, Oral History Project, satisfies all three of the Honors College Global Learning Objectives.

*Global Awareness:* Through your engagement in the oral history project, you will demonstrate knowledge of the interrelated dynamics (social-cultural, political, economic, etc.) that shape the diverse thinking of multiple figures in diverse cultural contexts.

*Global Perspective:* Through your engagement in the oral history project, you will be able to analyze the multiple causal forces that shape the perspectives of historical individuals — economic, political, sociological, technological, cultural, etc.

*Global Engagement:* Through your engagement in the oral history project, you will demonstrate a willingness to engage in evidence-based investigation in order to solve a global issue.

*Global Learning Co-Curricular Activity:* You will perform at least twenty hours of Community Service per academic year either through the Honors College service partnerships or through other community service projects and/or events. If you want to apply this service to your graduation portfolio, be sure to document your hours.

This syllabus and the following calendar are tentative and thus subject to change. Changes will be announced in class or by email sent to students' FIU address.

## COURSE CALENDAR (subject to change)

*All dates are tentative and the instructor holds the right to change due dates and presentation dates, providing ample notice to students.*

<b>Class Meeting</b>	<b>Topic of Discussion</b>	<b>Readings/Assignments (Links on Blackboard)</b>
Tuesday Aug 22	Overview of syllabus, review course expectations, discuss group and individual assignments, begin discussion of course themes: what does it mean to be an American?	
Thursday Aug 24	Foundations of American “Myths”: What we told (tell) ourselves it means to be an American: America the Grand Melting Pot, They City Upon a Hill and American Exceptionalism, The American Dream	<i>Readings:</i> Americanization 1917 (PDF pp. 62-64; 94-99); The Melting Pot—A poem
Tuesday Aug 29	The Foundations of American “Character”	<i>Readings:</i> Emma Lazarus, <i>The New Colossus</i> ; the Declaration of Independence; <i>Articles:</i> Americanism; America as Philosophy; J. Stuart Mill Individuality <b><i>Due: Current Affairs Discussion #1</i></b>
Thursday Aug 31		<i>Readings:</i>
Tuesday Sep 05		<i>Readings:</i>
Thursday Sep 07	American Myths: The Grand Melting Pot	<i>Readings: Immigrant Voices:</i> Letters from an American Farmer; The Promised Land; <i>Articles:</i> Melting Pot v. Cultural Pluralism; In Favor of the Melting Pot Metaphor; The American Melting Pot <b><i>Due: Student-Lead Discussion (Grp 1)</i></b>
Tuesday Sep 12		<i>Readings:</i> <b><i>Due: Current Affairs Discussion #2</i></b>
Thursday Sep 14		<i>Readings: Handouts:</i> T. Ansary, <i>West of Kabul, East of New York</i> , pp. 22-37; <b><i>Due: Reaction Paper #1</i></b>
Tuesday Sep 19	American Myths: The Grand Melting Pot and Alternative Metaphors	<i>Readings:</i> <b><i>Due: Student-Lead Discussion (Grp 2)</i></b>
Thursday Sep 21		<i>Readings:</i>
Tuesday Sep 26		<i>Readings: Handouts:</i> H.B. Cavalcanti, <i>Almost Home</i> , pp. 40-71; G. P. Firmat, <i>Next Year in Cuba</i> , pp. 262-279; <b><i>Due: Current Affairs Discussion #3</i></b>
Thursday Sep 28	American Myths: The City Upon a Hill and American Exceptionalism	<i>Readings:</i> <b><i>Due: Student-Lead Discussion (Grp 3)</i></b>
Tuesday Oct 3		<i>Readings:</i>
Thursday Oct 5		<i>Readings: Immigrant Voices:</i> The Soul of an Immigrant pp.279-289

		<i>Handouts: A. Min, The Cooked Seed, pp.194-215;</i> <b>Due: Current Affairs Discussion #4</b>
Tuesday Oct 10	American Myths: The American Dream, the utopian version	<b>Due: Student-Lead Discussion (Grp 4)</b>
Thursday Oct 12		<i>Readings:</i> <b>Due: Reaction Paper #2</b>
Tuesday Oct 17		<i>Readings: Immigrant Voices: From Alien to Citizen, pp.179-184; A Far Journey, pp.185-197; Handouts: K. Tepesh, Escape from Despair, pp.332-357;</i>
Thursday Oct 19	American Myths: The American Dream, the dystopian version	<i>Readings:</i> <b>Due: Student-Lead Discussion (Grp 5)</b>
Tuesday Oct 24		<i>Readings: Immigrant Voices: Chinaman's Chance pp.312-327</i> <b>Due: Current Affairs Discussion #5</b>
Thursday Oct 26		
Tuesday Oct 31	American Myths: Freedom of Religion	<i>Readings: Handout: Freedom of Religion in America, Taylor and Hawley</i> <b>Due: Student-Lead Discussion (Grp 6)</b>
Thursday Nov 02		<i>Readings: Handout: Religious Pluralism and Democratic Inclusion: the American Recipe for Piece, Gorski</i> <b>Due: Current Affairs Discussion #6</b>
Tuesday Nov 07		<i>Readings:</i>
Thursday Nov 09	DISSERTATION DEFENSE <i>Work on Projects</i>	<b>NO CLASS!!!</b> <i>Work on your projects!!!!</i>
Tuesday Nov 14	American Myths: The American Frontier and Rugged Individualism	<i>Readings: Handout: Myths of the American Frontier, Slatta</i> <b>Due: Student-Lead Discussion (Grp 7)</b>
Thursday Nov 16		<i>Readings:</i> <b>Due: Current Affairs Discussion #7</b>
Tuesday Nov 21		<b>Due: Reaction Paper #3</b>
Thursday Nov 23	Thanksgiving Day Holiday...NO CLASS!!!	
Tuesday Nov 28	TBD by the class	<b>Student-Lead Discussion (Grp 8)</b>
Thursday Nov 30	Wrap up and review of course topics	<b>Due: Current Affairs Discussion #8</b> <b>Due: Autobiographical Story</b>
Dec 04 or 06	Check Panthersoft for Finals Week Schedule	<b>Due: Presentation of Autobiographical Story</b>

**The New Colossus**  
**by Emma Lazarus**

*This is the poem on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty*

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,  
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;  
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand  
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame  
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name  
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand  
Glow world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command  
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.  
"Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she  
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"