AESTHETICS, VALUES AND AUTHORITY: CONFRONTING AMERICA

In recent years it has become commonplace for American citizens to look critically at the behavior of the nation and its people. The idea that it is a good thing for citizens to actively critique and criticize the government and the people is alive and well in the United States. Today there is a spirit in this nation that supports challenges to authority and individualism, and there is a conflict between citizens as to what beliefs and behaviors define national loyalty and patriotism. Clearly there is conflict within the nation. In the United States articulation of conflicting views is protected by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The American experience is grounded in this spirit and the authority associated with citizenship empowers all to participate in the process of governing the nation. Evidence of this is obtained by considering the struggles and changes which mark the evolution of the nation from its inception. Beginning with a reading of Common Sense, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights we will examine personalities and phenomena which give America meaning. Utilizing selected readings, films, and other cultural artifacts, as well as through individual and group projects, we will examine the character of America. The Fall term will focus on the foundations of the American character and the Spring term will focus on the analysis of contemporary issues identified by seminar participants.

In the past this seminar has planned a four day trip to Washington, D.C. during the Spring term. Early in the Fall seminar participants will decide if they wish to build such a trip into their Honors experience. If the seminar decides to include this experience in the Spring term they will be expected to earn money to help reduce out of pocket expenses for all.

FALL 2006: - THE AMERICAN CHARACTER

The seminar will begin by examining cultural artifacts, personalities and events that have shaped the character of the people of America from the founding of the nation to 1975. Recognizing that it is not possible to consider all of the forces that shaped the American

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1 This course is designed to span both the Fall and Spring semesters.
character, specific themes have been identified which provide a basis for understanding. This understanding will serve as a base-line for the analysis of contemporary issues in American life during the Spring semester.

**Goals of the seminar are to:**
- engage students in critical thought
- create and maintain a simulating intellectual experience for all seminar participants
- advance each seminar participant’s understanding of the importance of aesthetics, values and authority in establishing a national character.
- demonstrate the interrelationships linking aesthetics, values and authority in shaping a world view
- identify the issues which will serve as the central themes for the spring seminar

**Format**

As this course is offered as a seminar it is expected that meetings will include regular and lively focused discussions. The course instructor has the responsibility for setting the themes, making assignments and respecting the contributions of well prepared seminar participants in all discussions. The participants have the responsibility to come to meetings prepared, actively participate in discussions, act respectfully towards all seminar participants, and to complete all assignments on time. It should be understood that students who arrive at seminar meetings unprepared are by definition disrespectful to the entire seminar.

Because the seminar meets for 2 hours and 45 minutes there is plenty of time for discussion and the viewing of full length films.

**Grading**

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<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>90-94</td>
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<tr>
<td>95-100</td>
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<td>64-66</td>
<td>D</td>
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<td>BELOW 60</td>
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**Requirements**

**Reflective papers:** 30%
At intervals noted on the seminar calendar students will submit reflective papers of no more than 3 pages. These papers are intended to provide seminar participants with an opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of the evolution of the seminar up to a specific point in time on the course calendar.

**Group project:** 15%
Participants will join a reading group and, after reading the selected novel, collectively prepare a paper of no more than 8 pages relating the story to the theme of the need to assimilate while maintaining identity. Additionally, the group will make a presentation of approximately 20 minutes in
length to the seminar and entertain questions.

DRAFT

Take home mid-term examination: 25%
Students will respond to 2 of 3 questions on a take home examination. These questions will be drawn from the experiences of the seminar up to the point of the examination. Students will have two weeks to complete this task.

Final synthesis project: 20%
Each participant in the seminar will be expected to develop a project that synthesizes the seminar experience. Participants will make 10 minute presentation to the entire seminar. (Presentations taking more than 10 minutes will be penalized .5 grade for each minute over 10. Those electing to develop a paper will be limited to 15 pages of text. Students who choose to develop a non-traditional project should discuss their project with the instructor and establish evaluation guidelines acceptable to both parties.

Participation: 10%
A seminar is only as good as the participants make it. Students will be graded on the quality of their participation in seminar activities. It should be understood that quality is significantly more noteworthy than quantity.

Guideline for all written work

All papers and the mid term examination will be submitted electronically. This work should be produced in accordance with the guidelines below.

- Work will be submitted no later than 2 pm on the date it is due.
- Work should be formatted as if on standard 81/2 x 11 paper, doubled spaced, with standard margins, and prepared using a standard 12 point font.
- All work done outside of the seminar will be proofread and corrected thoroughly.
- Students should follow a manual of style when preparing written. Any standard style is acceptable.
- Name and student numbers as well as page numbers should appear on to top of each page of all work.
- All work should have a title page. (not counted in page limits)
- Students should keep a copy of all written work submitted
- Work received after deadlines may be marked down for lateness

ALL STUDENT WORK IS TO BE ORIGINAL. PROPER REFERENCES ARE REQUIRED WHEN USING THE WORK OF OTHERS IN YOUR PAPERS. VIOLATORS OF THIS POLICY MAY BE AWARDED A GRADE OF “F” FOR THE COURSE.

Submission of written work
All work should be sent electronically to fainhonors07@gmail.com
REQUIRED TEXTS:


GROUP PROJECT BOOKS (only one required – assignments will be made in class):


Electronic Readings: go to [http://www.fiu.edu/~honors/links.html](http://www.fiu.edu/~honors/links.html)

**The Founding of the Nation**

* Thomas Paine; Common Sense
* Second Treatise on Government; Chapter 2 - Of the State of Nature
* Benjamin Franklin On the Federal Constitution
* Time Magazine: Citizen Ben's Great Virtues
* Securing the Republic: Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia
* George Washington's Farewell Address
* Last Will and Testament by George Washington

**The Negroes and the Nation**

* The Emancipation Proclamation
* A House Divided Against Itself Cannot Stand- 1858
* The Avalon Project; Second Inaugural Address of Abraham Lincoln
* Industrial Education for the Negro by Booker T. Washington
* The Case of the Negro
The Talented Tenth by W.E.B. DuBois  
Susan B. Anthony; Women’s Right to Vote  

Electronic Readings continued on next page  

An Emerging Nation Responds to Immigration  
The New Colossus  
Ancestors in the Americas; The Chinese Exclusion Repeal Act  
United States Immigration Policy; Bill of Rights in Action  
Chinese Evolution Act, 1882  

Unique American Art forms  
Casey at the Bat  
Isadora Duncan and The Dance  
Louis Sullivan, The tall office building artistically considered  
Louis Sullivan, Buildings Extant in Chicago  
William James, What Pragmatism Means  

The Spirit of a Nation  
Frederick Jackson Turner: The Frontier In American History (Chapters I and XII)  
Franklin Delano Roosevelt; The Four Freedoms  

RECOMMENDED READINGS FOR THOSE INTERESTED IN THOUGHT ON THE EVOLUTION OF AMERICA AND AMERICAN IDEALS:  


Tentative Course Calendar

Fall semester 2007
Professor S. M. Fain

29 August  Presentation of the seminar
Is there really a unique American character?
The emerging spirit of the enlightenment:
   Aesthetics (the American spirit), Values (the American disposition) and Authority (the structure of American government)
Film: Mr. Smith Goes to Washington.

5 September  Fundamental forces shaping the character of Americans
Read: John Lock: Second Treatise on Government (electronic reading)
Read: Thomas Paine: Common Sense (electronic reading)
Read: Benjamin Franklin: On the Federal Constitution (electronic reading)

Sources of Authority
   In Class readings:
   The Declaration of Independence
   The Constitution of the United States of America
   The Bill of Rights

Discussion: What are the sources of authority called upon in these readings?

12 September  Basic American Values: Role Models and Initiatives
Continuation of the Discussion above
Read: George Washington: Farewell Address (electronic reading)
Read: George Washington: Last Will and Testament (electronic reading)
Read: Thomas Jefferson: Notes on the State of Virginia (electronic reading)
Read: Time Magazine: Citizen Ben’s Great Virtues (electronic reading)

Reflective Paper 1 Due (sent electronically prior to class)
Task 1: After reading The Constitution of the United States and reflecting on its meaning identify three principles you find central to the evolution of the United States. Arrange these principles in order of their significance (the first being the most significant and the third the least significant of the three) and discuss the relationship of each principle to the others.

19 September  Refining Basic American Values: Role Models and Initiatives
Read: A. Lincoln: A House Divided Against Itself Cannot Stand (electronic reading)
Read: A. Lincoln: Second Inaugural Address (electronic reading)
Read: Susan B. Anthony: Women’s Right to Vote (electronic reading)
Discussion: What is the relationship between actions and beliefs?
Assignment of book groups

26 September  **Conflicting Visions**
Read: B.T. Washington: *The Case of the Negro* (electronic reading)
Read: W.E.B. DuBois: *The Talented Tenth* (electronic reading)

**Reflective Paper 2 Due (sent electronically prior to class)**

**Task 2:** Consider all seminar readings and activities and explain what you think the relationship between values and authority was in the United States during the general period 1850-1900. Present at least one example from our seminar readings that supports your position. Finally, consider contemporary America and discuss whether or not there has been a change in American values during the last century

3 October  **Welcome to American: A Contradictory Example**
Read: E. Lazarus: *The New Colossus* (electronic reading)
Read: Ancestors in the Americas; The Chinese Exclusion Repeal Act (electronic reading)
Read: United States Immigration Policy; Bill of Rights in Action (electronic reading)
Read: Chinese Evolution Act, 1882 (electronic reading)
Read: The Chinese Exclusion Repeal Act (electronic reading)

**Take Home Mid-Term Examination distributed**

10 October  **Truth and beauty: What is Aesthetics?**
Read: W. James: *What Pragmatism Means* (electronic reading)

17 October  **Truth and beauty as seen by Americans**
Read: B. J. Zavrel: Isadora Duncan and The Dance (electronic reading)
Read: L. H. Sullivan (in class handout)
Read: L.H, Sullivan: The tall office building artistically considered (electronic reading)
Read: L. H. Sullivan: Buildings Extant in Chicago (electronic reading)
Read: E. L. Thayer: *Casey at the Bat* (electronic reading)

**Take Home Mid-Term Examination due (sent electronically prior to class)**

24 October  **The reconceptualization of America: Shifting values – Emerging new sources of authority**
Read: Gutierrez, Chapter 3, The Four Freedoms Viewed in Comparison to Traditional American Political Ideals,” *(Educating for Democracy in a Changing World)*
Read: Franklin Delano Roosevelt; The Four Freedoms (electronic reading)

31 October  **Continuation of 24 October.**
Read: Theodore Roosevelt, 1894, “True American.” (electronic reading)

7 November  **Significant cultural shifts: Identifying the catalyst for change**
Film: *Swing Shift*

14 November  **Towards the American Dream**
Reflective Paper 3 Due (sent electronically prior to class)
Task: Consider the following proposition: aesthetics is a vital dimension in the process of forging a national identity. Building on all seminar experiences thus far support or refute this proposition. Use examples from seminar readings to demonstrate your position.

21 November

28 November Presentations by Book Review Groups

5 December

Last Class Meeting
presentations of synthesis projects
course / professor evaluation