A meaningful connection to the past demands, above all, active engagement. It
demands imagination and empathy, so that we can fathom worlds unlike our
own, contexts far from those we know, ways of thinking and feeling that are alien
to us. We must enter past worlds with curiosity and respect.

---Gerda Lerner, Why History Matters

Primary Texts:

- Eric Lu, *The Accidental Asian: Notes of a Native Speaker*
- Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*
- Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine*
- Dalton Conley, *Honky*
- John Edgar Wideman, *Brothers and Keepers*

Secondary Texts: A Course Packet


In the end, not talking about something like race, class, or gender doesn’t render
it meaningless; on the contrary, the silences can make it all the more
consequential and culturally effective.

---Lorraine Delia Kenny, *Daughters of Suburbia*

Objectives:

This course focuses on the theme of identity in current American literature in three genres:
fiction, nonfiction and poetry. The loose structure of the course is borrowed from Lucy
Lippard’s, *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America*. Lippard titles each chapter in
her book with a gerund, the grammatical form of process. We will discuss the significance of the
processes Lippard names in *Mixed Blessings* as they play out in the stories selected for this
course, as well as in the story of our own lives:
1. **“Naming”**—is about self-naming and being labeled, about coming to terms with self-representation, despite the shape-shifting identities most of us are forced to assume;

2. **“Telling,”** about history, family, religion, and storytelling. Telling looks back to where the intercultural process began weighing the burdens of the past on the present,

3. **“Landing”** is about roots and points of departure, about taking place and being displaced,

4. **“Mixing”** is about mestizaje, or miscegenation—the double-aged past of rape and colonization, the double-edged future of a new and freely mixed world, and

5. **“Turning Around,”** is about subversion and trickery, the uses of humor and irony by which subjugated people survive.

I see education as a means to challenge rigid patterns of thinking that perpetuate injustice and instead encourage flexible analytic skills, which include the ability to self-reflectively evaluate the complex relations of powers and emotion.

---Megan Boler, *Feeling Power*

*Also:* This course functions as a Gen. Ed. so students are required to practice and demonstrate a wide range of skills:

- **Subject Knowledge**—you must demonstrate the ability to write analytical essays, as well as an introductory knowledge of literary terms, an awareness of different genres, and an ability to use the MLA format for composing analytical essays.

- **Communication**—an ability to communicate orally (in class discussions) and in writing.

- **Inquiry and Critical Thinking**—the ability to use secondary readings as a critical lens for reading primary texts.

- **Information Retrieval and Evaluation**—the secondary packet for this course provides a range of sources and key terms to use to enhance your reading of primary texts.

- **Interdisciplinary Relationships**—When you read a work of literature—whether a novel or a collection of essays, you are reading the world. Consequently, it helps to read broadly to understand the wider picture. The readings selected in the course packet attempt to model this sort of wide reading—articles come from a host of disciplines: History, Women’s Studies, Sociology, Art History, Cultural Anthropology.

- **Global/Multicultural Perspectives**—You must demonstrate the ability to approach a subject from multiple perspectives.

- **Social Responsibility**—We will question how reading literature connects to social and ethical issues.

- **Multicultural Issues**: The texts selected for this course represent a range of cultures and ethnicities as well as gender issues. One of the central aims of the course is to discuss ways to study and discuss “differences.”

For any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heterglot conception of the world. All words have a “taste” of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and the hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. Contextual overtones (generic, tendentious, individualistic) are inevitable in the word.

---Mikhail Bakhtin, “Discourse and the Novel.”
Course Questions:

We will take up a few of the questions raised in *Mapping Multiculturalism*,

- How does “culture” work on individuals in seen and unseen ways?
- What are the promises and limitations of multiculturalism as a rubric for new knowledge?
- How are concepts of race linked to questions of power and institutional authority?
- Why does multiculturalism still produce so much simultaneous rejection, ambivalence, and interest?
- How do its meanings vary?
- What cultural and political traditions is multiculturalism replacing or displaying?

Course Themes:

Repeatedly, the authors selected here meditate on the idea of what it means to be an “American.” We will take up this theme as well as explore what is meant by the “myth of white culturelessness” (Kenny 247). We will study concepts like “race” and “class” and what Kenny calls, “the Insider-Other” (packet 243). We will examine how studying issues of multiculturalism can teach us about our own agency, identity, personhood, and individuality.

Course Methods:

- You will practice three kinds of writing: writing-to-learn (In-class writing and Daily Reading Responses), literary analysis (with MLA conventions), and multi-genre writing.
- We’ll take an interdisciplinary approach to the primary texts, using writing from other fields to help us to read the literature in a wider context (borrowing from such fields as History, Philosophy, Education, Women’s Studies, Cultural Studies, American Studies/Consumer Culture Studies and Anthropology).
- We’ll practice what Megan Boler calls, “testimonial reading” vs. “passive empathy.”

Requirements:

1. **Daily Reading Response Binder: 25%**

   The purpose of this writing is to help you to notice things that strike your attention. Try to notice more things. Play with ideas, speculate, respond, ask questions. Note the due dates for reading responses on the schedule. I will collect these responses from time to time without notice to grade---in the margins, I will place a check next to comments that I find particularly intriguing---and I might add a plus mark (+) or a minus (-) to indicate if you’re on or off track. Your responses should be at least 1 page long, typed/ single-spaced. **Place the due date (as listed on the syllabus) at the top of each response, and note the title and chapters of the reading to which you are responding. Place all reading responses in a manila file folder used for this class alone.**
These observations/reflections can take many forms. For example,

- You can note patterns of images or of word choice. If a character or narrator is discussing love but uses language relating to commerce, or to war, or to politics, it might be good to make note of that.
- You can also identify the significant features of a central character or scene. What do characters look like? Is this important? How and when does the narrator describe the characters? Where does the action take place, and how is that place identified and described? Notice that sometimes, even a lack of information becomes important.
- Identify narrative strategies.
- Visual Responses: You are welcome to create an alternative sort of response, inspired by the reading. For example, Morrison writes at length about the abstract concept of “beauty” and what it means to be beautiful. You might peruse a popular magazine to see how beauty is represented in popular culture & then create a visual collage/commentary. Be sure to root your alternative response in a concrete passage from the reading. Be creative.

2. **(Two) 3-6 page Literary Analysis Essays (30%)**

You must present a careful analysis of some aspect of a single course text (usually called close reading). Remember that textual analysis is a formal academic discipline and that every paper you write for me will test your mastery of its principles. Let me stress this point: the papers are tests. When you write, then, your task is to demonstrate your ability to present your analysis in a coherent and grammatically correct format. I will evaluate your performance in three basic categories of concern: structure, content, and presentation. Each category will count for approximately one third of your grade for the paper---though, of course, poor performance in one category inevitably will affect the success of the others. Please don’t assume that I can or will “just read for the ideas” in a poorly presented or illogically constructed essay. I am particularly dismayed when I see errors that are repeated from essay to essay, so make a special effort to apply criticisms of earlier essays to later writing assignments in the class.

If you are not sure that you know how to write the kind of paper I am requiring, please don’t hesitate to ask for advice or help. I will be happy to help you with each stage of the writing process.

3. **Discussion Initiator: Offers a summary of a Scholarly Essay: 5%**

At least one Friday of the semester it will be your job to initiate the discussion by saying a few words about one of the secondary readings (the essays in the packet), and then using that to raise questions and issues for discussions. You do not need to agree with the essay you use as a point of departure, nor do you need to disagree with it. You should bring to class a written summary of the scholar’s argument (thesis, mode of interpretation, and samples of evidence the scholar uses), but you should not read this in class. In class, you should briefly summarize the scholar’s position, and then use that as an entrance into the day’s discussion, i.e. “How does this reading help us to read the primary text?”
4. Multi-Genre Project: 40%

The multi-genre paper is a hybrid sort of writing assignment that counts as the equivalent of a final exam for this course. It calls on you to be creative, critical and innovative. In it you will “meld fact, interpretation, and imagination” into a series of self-contained pieces that appear in forms that include poetry, prose, drama, exposition, as well as visual representation of concepts (Romano 109). *The good news:* There are no hard and fast guidelines. *The bad news:* There are no hard and fast guidelines---for some, this may make you a little uncomfortable. To alleviate some uncertainties we will spend a whole class period discussing/brainstorming the possibilities for this final assignment. You are required to:

- Choose one of the writers we’ve read to read/research in-depth.
- Gather outside research about the author’s life and philosophy.
- I will provide a more detailed handout about the requirements for this particular assignment at a later date.

**The Structure**

**Literature Circles**

I will often begin class with a close reading of a single passage from the night’s reading and I will raise a few questions about the reading. Then I will divide you up into small groups of 4 and 5 for “literature circles.” In a literature circle every person has a job of sorts. One person raises a provocative question. One person finds quotations that speak to the question. One person might explain how the secondary reading comes to bear on the primary reading. One person acts as scribe taking notes of what gets discussed in the group. The aim is to help each other to have a richer understanding of the reading. The purpose of the small groups is to facilitate discussion. It is easier to talk in a small group first, but we will close class by coming back to as a whole class to hear from individual groups.

**In-Class Writing**

We will use writing as a way-to-think on paper. Sometimes our writing will stem from a quotation. I will ask you to think about what a certain passage means to you. Sometimes I will ask you to simply generate a list of questions that stem from the night’s reading. Sometimes I will ask you to make connections between what we have read and what you have seen in the world recently---either in films, on the news, in the Modesto Bee, in stores, in magazines, or even in dialogues overheard in passing.

Bring your manila file folder to every class. *All of your typed reading responses go in the folder as well as in-class writings.* Everything must be kept in chronological order, so it is important that you date and label all of your writing.
Writing Workshop

We will have a few workshops where we focus on the elements that comprise a critical/literary analysis paper: MLA academic conventions (MLA Works Cited page, parenthetical quotations), as well as common grammatical issues that spring up etc.

When seen as a set of symbolic devices for controlling behavior...culture provides the link between what [individuals] are intrinsically capable of becoming and what they actually, one by one, in fact become. Becoming human is becoming individual, and we become individual under the guidance of cultural patterns, historically created systems of meaning in terms of which we give form, order, point, and direction to our lives. And the cultural patterns involved are not general but specific—not just “marriage” but a particular set of notions about what men and women are like, how spouses should treat one another, or who should properly marry whom; not just “religion” but belief in the wheel of karma, the observance of a month of fasting, or the practice of cattle sacrifice....

---Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays

Deadlines and Attendance

It is essential that you come to class on time and fully prepared. Unexcused late papers will harm your grade considerably. All materials must be typed. If you have more than three absences your grade will drop a letter. If you have repetitive absences, lateness or late papers (or any combination of the three) you will fail the course.

Also:

If you need extra help, or if you have questions please contact me via email or in my office. Due to the tight nature of my own schedule I won’t be able to answer your questions just before class starts and just after class.

Plagiarism:

If you claim (explicitly or implicitly, intentionally or unintentionally) as your own something written in whole or in part by someone else, or if you claim as your own someone else’s ideas or observations, or if you claim as your own someone else’s line of thought or of argument, then you are guilty of plagiarism and you will fail the course.

The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn’t outside power or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn’t a reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its own regimes of truth: that is, types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value and the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. ---Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power.”
Tentative Schedule: Read the work listed for that day.

Week 1: Naming

9/4 Wed. *Introductions to the course and to each other.* In-class writing assignment. Read the course syllabus carefully & please sign the course contract acknowledging that you understand all of the terms (attendance policy) as well as the requirements for this course.

9/6 Fri. “Genealogy, ” James Autry (poetry) in course packet + “Why History Matters,” by Gerda Lerner pp.2-10 (packet). I will explain in more detail what I’m looking for in the Reading Responses

Week 2: Naming/Telling


R.R. #1 Due


Presenters: ________________________________

Week 3: Naming/Telling


Read, “Notes of a Native Speaker” 33-56.

R.R. #2 Due


R.R. #3 Due


Presenters: ________________________________

Week 4: Telling

9/23 Mon. Due: Rough draft of Critical Analysis Paper #1
(In-class Writing Workshop)

           **R.R. #4 Due**

9/27 Fri.  “Introduction: Truth or Dare” from *Daughters of Suburbia: Growing Up White, Middle-Class, and Female* (packet) pp.242-250.

            **Presenters: ________________________**

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**Week 5: Telling**

           **Final Draft of Critical Analysis Paper #1 Due.**

10/2 Wed.  *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison pp.94-131
           **R.R. #5 Due**

10/4 Fri.  ---

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**Week 6: Telling**

10/7 Mon.  Soft-Soaping Empire: Commodity Racism and Imperial Advertising, Barbara McClintock 171-end (packet).

            **Presenters: ________________________**

           **R.R. #6 Due**

10/11 Fri.  Peggy McIntosh article (course packet) pp.11-19.

            **Presenters: ________________________**

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**Week 7: Landing/Mixing/Turning Around**

10/14 Mon.  *Jasmine*, Mukherjee Ch 1-10
           **R.R. #7**

10/16 Wed.  **Columbus Day—No Class**


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**Week 8: Landing/Mixing/Turning Around**

10/21 Mon.  *Jasmine*, Mukherjee, Ch.11-19, (68-140).

R.R. #8 Due


Presenters: _______________________

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Week 9: Landing/Mixing/Turning Around

10/28 Mon. *Jasmine*, Mukherjee, Ch. 23-24 (165--End).

Rough draft of Critical Analysis Paper #2 Due.

In-class writing workshop.


Presenters: _______________________

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Week 10: Naming/Telling

11/4 Mon. *Honky*, Conley, Ch. 4-5 (pp.37-64). R.R. #9 Due

Final Draft of Critical Analysis Paper #2 Due.

11/6 Wed. *Honky*, Conley, Ch. 6-8 (pp.65-102).


Presenters: _______________________

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Week 11: Naming/Telling


➢ Introduction to the Multi-Genre Assignment

11/15 Fri. *Honky*, Conley, Ch. 13-Conclusion.

Week 12: Naming/Telling


Presenters: _______________________

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Week 13: Turning Around

11/25 Mon.  Brothers and Keepers, pp. 91-154
11/27 Wed.  Multi-Genre Stations
11/29 Fri.  No class, Thanksgiving
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Week 14: Turning Around

12/6 Fri.  Part I. Multi-Genre Presentations
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Week 15

12/9 Mon.  Last day of class, Part 2 presentations & Multi-genre paper Due.