

American Decades

Course No.: HUM 221, Section 650 -- Spring 2009
English Department – College of Lake County

Lecture/Discussion: B118 – Tuesday and Thursday, 2:30- 3:45 p.m.

Instructor: John Kupetz (office B252; office phone – 847/543-2989; home phone – 847/328-5101; e-mail --jkupetz@clcollinois.edu)

Office Hours: MW: 8 a.m. – noon; TR: 8 – 9 a.m.; also by appointment or walk-in.

Texts: *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald
The Street by Ann Petry
The Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger
The Iceman Cometh by Eugene O’Neill

The College of Lake County course catalog describes American Decades and says of it: “This course introduces students to the interdisciplinary study of American Culture by examining the intercultural/multicultural ideas, process, values, motifs and traditions that have shaped our ‘pluralistic’ society. American history, philosophy, literature, visual and performing arts will be studied. Emphasis will be placed on reflecting the diverse cultural constituency of the United States and the cultural identity of American racial and ethnic minorities. Focus will be placed on specific decades; by comparing these decades students will develop analyzing and synthesizing skills which will be used to develop a holistic picture of American life.” Specifically, this Honors section of American Decades should help students broaden and deepen their understanding of several major themes and issues around which American artists focus much of their work. Their concerns include the role of the individual in society and a definition of the American dream as well as specific political, cultural, psychological, philosophical, historical, aesthetic and social conflicts. Specifically, this course will ask students to analyze cultural products that explore the nature of the American dream and the American identity and examine them in the perspectives of race, class and gender. This course will not seek to proselytize about the solutions to the issues so much as it will explore the questions that cultural products raise. The course also will explore cultural products as rhetorical devices addressed to an audience, often a mass audience. The key to examining cultural products in this course will be context and complexity over isolation and simplicity.

Course Outcomes

The study of culture in its full historical context can make life more interesting. That said, this course is designed to help students achieve several specific learning outcomes. Through this course, students should be able to:

1. Identify some of the major purposes of American cultural product and how to identify which purposes a creator has chosen.
2. Use the vocabulary for discussing cultural products, including plot, theme, character, tone, mood, symbol, irony and point of view.
3. Understand the genres of culture, including in literature alone short stories, novels, drama and poetry as well as creative nonfiction.
4. Increase their reading skills to meet the demands placed upon students who examine culture.
5. Present their ideas and questions about American culture clearly in discussions, reports and panels.
6. Write clearly and logically about their ideas and opinions of American culture and about specific work exploring it.
7. Understand how taste in cultural products differs from appreciation of cultural products.
8. Recognize how historical context helps in understanding American culture and specific cultural products.

9. Identify some of the major styles and philosophies that influence the creators of American cultural products in the Twentieth Century and beyond, including realism, naturalism, expressionism, existentialism and surrealism.
10. Sharpen their critical thinking to question and assess how well a creator succeeds in achieving a purpose in a cultural product.
11. Understand the role of convention, invention, form and formula in the creation and understanding of American cultural products.

Additionally, this course hopes to encourage students to explore their reasons for liking or disliking a work of American culture and to challenge their assumptions about what makes artistic as well as popular success. It also hopes to help students understand the experiences, cares and aspirations of people unlike themselves when an artist shows them an unfamiliar world. Finally, this course hopes to encourage students to ask themselves whether a better understanding and appreciation of American culture in its historical context can increase their awareness and tolerance of other people in American society.

Methods

Students should view the class as a guided group discussion. They will thoughtfully and carefully examine cultural works and talk about what they have examined in class. The class thus presupposes that they will complete the assignments to help generate intelligent discussions.

Course Policies

Attendance: Because discussions and reports are an important part of the class, attendance is crucial. Presentations and discussions cannot be made up, although a missed class can be excused because of a legitimate reason. Students who know they must miss a class because of illness or other serious circumstances should notify the instructor in advance (by telephone, if necessary), not after the fact. E-mail and other notes after the fact are not acceptable methods of informing the instructor about a missed class or assignment. Missed work that has been excused must be made up in an acceptable manner within one week. Finally, please be on time for class and come prepared to talk about the work to be examined.

Grading: Final grades will be based on all work done during the semester, with some emphasis on improvement. The grade for the class will be determined as follows:

- Class Participation & Panels: 20 percent
- Exam 1: 20 percent
- Exam 2: 20 percent
- Personal Response Essays/Journals: 10 percent
- Presentation: 15 percent
- Final Exam: 15 percent

Academic Integrity & Class Conduct: This course adheres to the regulations and policies outlined in the Student Rights and Responsibilities material made available to all students by the College of Lake County. This course also simulates professional standards for discussions and lectures in higher education as well as business. These standards also apply to matters of integrity. As a guideline, people have the trust of others until they lose that trust. As another guideline, this class takes the form of lecture and guided group discussion. In both formats, one person at a time has the floor to speak. **In addition, literature should foster mutual respect and tolerance in the discussion of ideas that challenge stereotypes and complacent thinking. Class discussion seeks to practice that respect and tolerance while providing the benefits and atmosphere of academic freedom and the First Amendment.**

Final Exam: 2:30 – 4:20 p.m. May 14 (Thursday)

FERPA Statement: Although students may forward e-mail from their CLC E-mail accounts to another e-mail account, in order to be in compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

and to guarantee the student's privacy, CLC personnel will communicate with students only through the official college e-mail address.

Instructions on how to forward e-mail can be found at:

http://yyzclcillinois.edu/ol/email_tutorial/forwardemail.html

Accommodations: If you have a documented disability that requires academic accommodations, please discuss this with me as soon as possible and contact the Office for Students with Disabilities-L112 to arrange for all necessary services. To request academic accommodations, due to a disability, please contact the Office for Students with Disabilities (847) 543-2474, L112 on the Grayslake campus. If you have an **Instructor Notification Form**, please make an appointment with me so we can discuss the accommodations you might need in this class.

The College of Lake County Counseling, Advising and Transfer Center offers professional counseling. This counseling is for students who are in crisis or are having personal problems, which as a result may affect their academic and career goals. The services of professional counselors are available at three locations on an appointment or drop-in basis: Grayslake Campus, C110, 847/543-2060; Lakeshore Campus in Waukegan, N211, 847/543-2186; and Southlake Center in Vernon Hills, R202, 847/543-6501.

Withdrawals, Tuition and Grades: Please check pp. 146-47 of *CLC Classes Spring 2009* for information about policies and procedures governing withdrawal from a course.

Important Update on the College of Lake County's Withdrawal/Grading Policies: If you plan to discontinue attending your class at any time during the semester, it is strongly recommended that you take responsibility for dropping the class. Grades of W will be assigned only to students who drop themselves. Instructors are required to report noticeable non-attendance of students. If you discontinue attending class and are dropped by the institution, the following grades will be assigned:

WN – Withdrawal, student never attended – *no impact on g.p.a.*

WS – Withdrawal of students who stop attending – *no impact on g.p.a.*

WF -- Withdrawal of students who stop attending after the official withdrawal date (68 percent) and instructor deems failing – *impact on g.p.a. is equivalent to a grade of F.*

Tentative Course Schedule

Jan. 20 – Introduction, “Cops”

Jan. 22 – “Almos’ A Man”; “The Immigrant”

Jan. 27 – *The Great Gatsby* through Chapter 5

Jan. 29 – *The Great Gatsby* Chapter 6 -- end

Feb. 3 – *City Lights*

Feb. 5 – *City Lights*, Panel Discussion

Feb. 10 – *King Kong*

Feb. 12 – *King Kong*, Panel Discussion

Feb. 17 – *The Iceman Cometh*, Through Act 2;

Feb. 19 – *The Iceman Cometh*, Act 3 -- end

Feb. 24 – *Casablanca*, Take-Home Exam Due 2:30 p.m.

Feb. 26 – *Casablanca*, Panel Discussion

March 3 – *The Street*, Through Chapter 10

March 5 – *The Street*, Chapter 11 -- end

March 10 – *Shadow of a Doubt* **EXAM 1 Due 2:30 p.m. March 10**

March 12 –

March 17 – Shadow of a Doubt, Panel Discussion
March 19 – *Rebel Without a Cause*

March 24 – *Rebel Without a Cause*, Panel Discussion
March 25 – *The Catcher in the Rye*, Through Chapter 16

March 30 – April 5 Spring Break

April 7 – *The Catcher in the Rye*, Chapter 16 -- end
April 9 – *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*

April 14 – *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, Panel Discussion
April 16 – Music, including the blues, rock 'n' roll and the counterculture

April 21 – *Night of the Living Dead*
April 23 – *Night of the Living Dead*, Discussion, **Exam 2 Due 2:30 p.m. April 23**

April 28 – Student Presentations
April 30 – Student Presentations

May 5 – Student Presentations
May 7 – Student Presentations

May 14 – Final Exam 2:30-4:20 p.m. (Thursday)