

MDGK 1180: Growing Up American: Who Do I Say I Am?
Loyola Marymount University, Fall 2018

Instructor: David Idol

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Core Area: Studies in American Diversity

Course Description: Inspired by the common aspiration for a better life—the all-powerful “American dream”—generations of immigrants from different parts of the world have made this country what it is, while they themselves have struggled with the personal, cultural, racial, and socio-economic realities involved in becoming American. In this course, we will examine what it means to be an American now, how this identity has changed over time, and the ways this identity has been contested and negotiated among diverse populations. We will study these questions through personal narratives, testimonies, opinions, fiction, film, and debates in popular culture. We will also engage with scholarly research in a variety of fields, including history, sociology, psychology, and ethnic studies. Topics discussed will include assimilation and/or differentiation, competing identities, interactions and exchange, cultural protectionism, and power and privilege. Almost 250 years into our national history, where do we stand in our national conversations on freedom, justice, and equality?

Student Learning Outcomes: You will complete this course with:

- a broader awareness of different immigrant groups’ histories, struggles, and achievements;
- a deeper understanding of the origins and historical trajectories of diverse American identities;
- a critical engagement with identity politics and with your own understanding of American identity;
- an awareness of the differences between popular debates and scholarly conversations;
- refined critical reading, research, and writing skills

Required Reading and Course Materials:

- Three books are required for purchase. They are available at the bookstore, or you may purchase them online. You must have a hard copy of each of these books to bring to class for discussion. They are:
 - Jeffrey Eugenides, *Middlesex*
 - Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*
 - Heidi Durrow, *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky*
- Literary selections, films, essays, and selected readings from the fields of history, sociology, psychology, and critical theory are posted on Brightspace. Depending on the group’s interests, this syllabus and its contents may be subject to revision; students are responsible for any changes or modifications distributed in class and/or posted on Brightspace.

Grade Breakdown:

- Participation: 10%
- Reading Quizzes: 10%
- One 15-minute Presentation: 10%
- 5 Current Event Posts/Comments: 10%
- 5 Reading Responses: 15%
- Midterm Paper (5-6 pages): 15%
- Final Research Project (10-12 pages): 30%

Coursework and Expectations:

- Class Format: This course is not a lecture. Instead, it aims to be a critical journey of self-reflection and examination about who we think *we* are as Americans and who we think *others* are as Americans as well. Thus, it relies on group discussion as the primary in-class method of teaching and learning. This discussion-based format invites students to share openly—and respectfully to others—their own thoughts about their own identities, their own experiences as well as their thoughts on others' identities and experiences. This method asks for students to participate actively in their own learning process and that of their peers. Class time will be used to deepen our understanding of the texts in their historical and cultural context and to reflect seriously on our often preconceived ideas about ethnicity, race, class, and gender as reflected in our understanding(s) of what it means to be(come) American.
- Attendance: As mentioned above, this class is not a lecture. Therefore, both your prompt attendance and participation are essential for its success. You are expected to attend every class meeting for the full class period having done the required work. If you need to miss class, please contact me. You are allowed up to two excused absences for any reason. Remember to save these absences for a good reason, e.g. illness. Arriving late or leaving early will negatively impact your participation grade, as will any absence beyond the allowed two. Six or more absences will result in an automatic F for the course. If there are extreme circumstances, contact me as early as possible. You are responsible for any material missed in class, whatever the reason for your absence. Check the syllabus, check Brightspace, and ask a classmate if you are unsure what you missed.
- Class Participation: Participation will be assessed through your thoughtful, prepared engagement during class time, especially in class discussions. Keep in mind that good class participation does not necessarily mean that you have all the right answers. It rather means that you are willing to pose questions, work with and challenge others' opinions in an academic and civil way, and generally contribute to class.
- Workload: The reading and writing pace of the class is **rigorous**. At LMU, 1 credit hour is defined as a minimum of 3 hours of work per week for a 15-week semester. That means that a 4-unit class must average a minimum of 12 hours of work per week (including class time). Typically, this will mean one hour of classroom instruction and two hours of out of class student work each week per each unit of a course. This course meets twice a week for an hour and a half and expects a **minimum of 12 hours of work per week for ALL class-related activities**. Although effort has been taken to make the reading balanced (and actually lighter on weeks that papers are due), the reading load is **not** always the same. Depending on your personal reading pace, consider reading ahead on days /weeks that the reading is lighter. You should come to class prepared, i.e., you should have finished the required reading **BEFORE** you come to class. **ALWAYS** bring the reading for the day with you. Make sure you annotate your texts while you are doing the reading and/or write comments on them during class discussion.

Assignments:

- Current Event Posts and Commentary: In an effort to make meaningful and critical connections between academic discourse and real life, students are asked to follow current events that reflect directly the class themes, readings, and discussions. Students are asked to post commentary on five relevant events (no more than a page) on the discussion board of the class site on Brightspace and be ready to discuss in class as a way of contributing to class discussions. These posts are due by 9:00 pm the day before class meets. Students are encouraged to respond to other students' posts for participation credit. Credit will be determined on the relevance and quality of the commentary. For full credit, post regularly (vs. all 5 posts the last week / day of class; half credit).
- Reading Quizzes: In order to promote student accountability in keeping up with the weekly readings, expect quizzes on the days new readings are due (see the syllabus). The format of the quizzes will assume that you have read the text *carefully* for important details and *critically* for arguments and support. If you have done the reading carefully and critically, no further preparation is required.
- Presentation: You will be asked to give a 15-minute CRITICAL presentation on a topic of your choice from the reading list for the week that you choose to present OR a current event that relates DIRECTLY to what we are discussing that week (i.e., a combination of the two). Do NOT just summarize your source. Instead, present it critically. Presentations need NOT present personal opinions but rather critical commentary on the author(s)' arguments (argument analysis). Students are encouraged to discuss their presentation topics for feedback during office hours before their presentation. You will be graded for preparation, relevance, clarity, coherence, and delivery.
- Reading Response Papers: In preparation for class discussion, you are asked to bring to class a one-page CRITICAL response (**single-spaced**) to **ONE** of the weekly readings specifically. I will not accept papers longer than one page or not single-spaced. Think of your responses like a reflective, explorative journal on the issues we will be discussing ranging from the very personal (e.g. who do I think I am as an American?) to the broader, more cultural, social, political issues (e.g. how does social class affect perceptions of racial identity?) that will give you ideas about your papers and final project (you can develop any of these reading response papers into a longer paper). Your response **cannot** be a summary of the essay/article/text. Keep in mind that you are **not** responsible for addressing the whole text. To meet the length requirement of this assignment, you must be very selective and pick one small detail/aspect of the text (a short passage or a quote for a close reading, a recurring theme, etc.). Think of your RR as a one-page paper with an introduction, a main part/analysis, and a conclusion. You have to write **a total of 5 RRs**.
 - **WHEN:** You choose your topics and days of submission. However, you have to submit on the day the reading is due (e.g. on week 4, on Thursday 9/20 Toni Morrison's brief essay on citizenship is due. If you chose to write on it, it is due on 9/20—not two weeks later).
 - **WHY:** These papers are designed to help you to keep up with the reading, to motivate you to reflect on the reading *before* you come to class, to help you participate in discussion since you will be prepared to do so, and to allow you to get credit for the work you have done even if you don't get a chance to participate on a particular meeting. Most importantly, the reading responses are a great critical thinking and writing exercise that will eventually help you with the conception and writing of your papers.

- Midterm Paper: You are required to write a short midterm paper (5-6 pages, double-spaced) (see class calendar for due date). The papers will go through several drafts and you will receive comments during one-on-one conferences. You will receive a prompt with more details on this assignment.
- Final Research Project (10–12 pgs.): Building on class readings and discussions as well as your personal interests, you will be asked to choose your own final research project that will involve academic research in order to articulate your own ideas about one aspect /variation of the organizing theme of our class: how one comes into American identity/what it means to be an American today. Personal testimonies, interviews, artistic/literary representations, etc. can be used in order to frame your topic. You will be asked to submit a written proposal that will include your topic, methodologies, proposed annotated bibliography, and an outline. You will be asked to make a 5-10 minute class presentation about the progress of your project. Your project will go through several drafts and you will receive comments during one-on-one conferences and peer-editing sessions. (More details will follow).

Papers must be typed, double-spaced (except RRs), with one-inch margins. Font must be 12-point Times New Roman. ALWAYS include the following information with **everything** you turn in: class number/title, your name, date, and **assignment title**:

MDGK 1998: Studies in American Diversity

Name

Date

Paper #1, draft #2

Instructor Policies:

- My office hours are listed at the top of this syllabus, and I am also available by appointment. Regular office hours do not require an appointment. Feel free to come to office hours for any reason.
- I check my e-mail once per day, only on weekdays. Feel free to e-mail me for any reason. Please keep in mind that it may take me 24 hours or more to respond to your e-mail, and if it requires a lengthy response, I will probably say that we should meet during office hours instead. Students are also expected to check their e-mail regularly, as I will often use e-mail to communicate with the class.
- Technology should be used to enhance learning, not distract from class. Laptops and tablets are allowed in class *only* if being used to take notes and review notes and reading. Phones must be placed on silent and put away. No texting, gchat, etc. Remain engaged! Violation of the technology policy will negatively affect your participation grade. At times, I will ask you to put away all devices. Bring a pen and paper to take notes when devices are not permitted. If I notice that technology is becoming a distraction, I may ban all technology from the classroom.
- Assignments submitted after the deadline will automatically be lowered 1/3 of a letter grade, and they will be lowered an additional 1/3 of a letter grade for each additional 24 hours they are late. In fairness to other students who work hard to turn their work in on time, papers late for more than one week will not be accepted (unless otherwise agreed on).
- Emergency Student Absence. If extreme circumstances (i.e. serious illness, hospitalization, or a death in the family) prevent you from coming to class and/or submitting an assignment on time, (1) e-mail me before the deadline to let me know you are unable to submit the assignment on time

and/or need to miss class, (2) contact the Student Affairs Dean's Office (SADO), and (3) meet with me as soon as possible to determine an appropriate extension and/or way to make up missed class. Under such extreme circumstances no more than ONE extension will be given.

University Policies:

- Expectations for Classroom Behavior: As an LMU Lion, by the Lion's Code, you are pledged to join the discourse of the academy with honesty of voice and integrity of scholarship and to show respect for staff, professors, and other students. Behavior appropriate for the success of the class is expected at all times. Please be in class on time. Do not disturb / disrupt other students' learning experience by coming to class late or leaving early, walking in and out, not having your textbook with you, using unpermitted electronic devices, etc. Be courteous during discussions. Please use common sense as to what behavior is appropriate and expected. If in doubt, ask me or refer to the LMU Community Standards handbook.
- Academic Honesty: Academic dishonesty will be treated as an extremely serious matter, with serious consequences that can range from receiving no credit for assignments to expulsion. It is never permissible to turn in any work that has been copied from another student or copied from a source (including Internet sources) without properly acknowledging the source. It is your responsibility to make sure that your work meets the standards set forth in the LMU Academic Honesty Policy (<http://academics.lmu.edu/honesty/>). If you have any doubts about correctly quoting your sources, you can consult any Writer's Manual (also available online) or talk to me.
- Special Accommodations: Students with special needs who require reasonable modifications, special assistance, or accommodations in this course should promptly direct their request to the Disability Support Services (DSS) Office. Any student who currently has a documented disability (ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Learning, Physical, or Psychiatric) needing academic accommodations should contact the DSS Office (Daum Hall 2nd floor, 310-338-4216) as early in the semester as possible. All discussions will remain confidential. Please visit www.lmu.edu/dss for additional information.
- Emergency Preparedness: To report an emergency or suspicious activity, contact the LMU Department of Public Safety by phone (x222 or 310-338-2893) or at the nearest emergency call box. In the event of an evacuation, follow the evacuation signage throughout the building to the designated safe refuge area where you will receive further instruction from Public Safety or a Building Captain. For more safety information and preparedness tips, visit <http://www.lmu.edu/emergency>.
- Reporting Requirements of Sexual or Interpersonal Misconduct: As "responsible employees," faculty are required to report any case of suspected sexual or interpersonal misconduct and cannot protect student confidentiality. For information about confidential counseling on campus and for general information about consensual relationships, sexual harassment, and sexual assault, please see the LMU Cares website: <http://studentaffairs.lmu.edu/lmucares/>
- Academic Excellence at LMU / Overall Assessment: In keeping with the larger context of LMU's mission of academic excellence, the encouragement of lifelong learning, the education of the whole person, and the promotion of faith and justice, critical thinking, academic and moral reflection as well as articulate expression are at the core of this class. Students are expected to be careful and critical readers, engaged learners; to write and speak with precision and clarity about important issues such as ethics and social justice. They are expected to assimilate class presentations on complex

topics such as academic, literary, and cultural discourse, control primary texts (i.e., read carefully and understand the content), and raise their own questions that reflect critical engagement with the class overall.

Grading Standards: The following grading scale will be used to assess and report the quality of your work in this course. Note that a grade of A may be modified by a minus (-) suffix, and grades B and C may be modified by a plus (+) or minus (-) suffix.

A: Superior. Student has exceeded expectations and achieved mastery of the subject.

- Participation: The student consistently makes important and creative contributions to the learning environment of the seminar. Questions and comments demonstrate that the student has thoroughly prepared the assigned material and is familiar with the issues involved. Questions help move the discussion forward. The student offers insightful comments that engage the rest of the class as well.
- Writing: The student has achieved mastery of the topic of the assignment. In the case where s/he chooses their own topic, it shows deep reflection and originality of thought. The writing is well organized, it shows clear grasp of the concepts involved, and it shows a superior ability to articulate ideas. Research is thorough and well documented. Writing itself shows mastery of style. Language is varied in pattern, sophisticated in vocabulary and complex in structure and thought. There are no spelling or punctuation errors and it is thoroughly edited and proofread.

B: Good. Student has met all expectations and accomplished above-average work.

- Participation: The student actively contributes to the learning environment of the class. Comments demonstrate that s/he is familiar with the assigned material. Questions seek information or clarification alone.
- Writing: The student demonstrates a clear understanding of the topic/subject matter. Work is generally organized in an effective way and the writing is competent. Research is good and documented. There are no spelling or punctuation errors and it is edited and proofread.

C: Satisfactory. Student has met most expectations and demonstrated a general comprehension of the subject.

- Participation: The student volunteers occasional comments in class discussions but is primarily a passive listener. The student contributes to small groups discussions. Comments do not show reflection on the texts and ideas discussed.
- Writing: The student demonstrates only a general understanding of the topic/subject matter. Work shows some evidence of initial research. Errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation are present. Writing needs to be improved by better organization of ideas, more nuanced thought and expression, more thorough uses of research sources, wider word choice, more complex sentence structure, overall editing and proofreading.

D: Poor. Student has met few expectations and has not shown an understanding of the subject.

- Participation: The student shows only minimal evidence of having studied the required material. The student makes no active contributions to discussions.
- Writing: Student work shows poor organization of ideas. Work illustrates only minimal evidence of having read and studied the required material. There are significant errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling. No editing or proofreading.

F: Failure. Student has not met expectations and has shown little effort to understand and engage with the material.

*****SCHEDULE*****

(Subject to change with notice)

Week 1

08/28: Introduction to the Course Requirements. Challenging Cultural Myths and Assumptions.

08/30: Personal Identities: Who Do I Say I am?

Read: T. Jefferson “Declaration of Independence (684-87);

RR#1 due: “I am an American...” The Declaration of Independence lays the foundational values of American society and identity: “*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*” Comparing such principles with contemporary values and practices, how would you describe what it means to you to be American today?

Week 2

09/04: Created Equal: The Melting Pot and the Myth of Equality

George M. Frederickson “Models of American Ethnic Relations” (565–575); V. Parillo “Causes of Prejudice” (504–516).

Presentations: _____

09/06: “We Are All Immigrants” / Assimilation or Multiculturalism

Read: R. Takaki “A Different Mirror” (538-55); Arturo Madrid “Diversity and its Discontents” (175-83); excerpt from *The Closing of the American Mind* (introduction 25-43).

RR#2 due

Presentations: _____

Week 3

09/11: Discuss *Middlesex*

Read: *Middlesex* –book one and two (pages 3–211)

Presentations: _____

09/13: Discuss *Middlesex*

Read: cont. *Middlesex* –book three (pages 215–270 ONLY)

Presentations: _____

RR# 3 due

Week 4

09/18: Race Matters

Read: B. Goyette “How Racism Created America's Chinatowns” (1-10); excerpt from Erika Lee *The Making of Asian America* (introduction 1–11); Karan Majahan “The Two Asian Americas” (np); Anna Quindlen “The Mosaic vs the Myth” (161–62).

Presentations: _____

09/20: MLK's dream 50 years later

Read: Martin Luther King Jr. "I have a Dream"; Cornell West from *Race Matters*; Toni Morrison, "A Return to Citizenship"

Presentations: _____

RR#4 due

Week 5

09/25: Watching in class: *Crash*

Watch: Finish *Crash* before class on 09/27

09/27: Discuss *Crash* and *Race Matters* readings from w. 4

Presentations: _____

RR#5 due

Week 6

10/02: White Privilege: How Can We Talk About It?

Read: Critical Race Theory Overview (1-9)

10/04: Continue discussion of white privilege and critical race theory

Read: A. Johnson, "Where White Privilege Came From" (1-5); R. Jensen "How White Privilege Shapes the US" (1-3); M. Robertson "A Newer White Consciousness" (1); P. McIntosh "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" (1-6); Ian F. Haney-Lopez "The Social Construction of Race" (191-203); Gene Nichol "Educating for Privilege" (395-97); "Macklemore and The Politics of Rap"

Presentations: _____

RR#6 due

Week 7

10/09: Free Speech/Hate Speech and Political Correctness

Read: J. Chait "Not a Very P.C. thing to Say" and B. Goyette's "What J. Chait Does not Understand about Identity Politics" (1-12)

Watch: film *Dear White People*

10/11: Cont. film /discussion

Presentations: _____

RR#7 due / CONFERENCES

Week 8

10/16: Emotional versus Critical Reasoning

Read: "The Coddling of The American Mind"; "White Liberals and Racism"

Presentations: _____

CONFERENCES

10/18: Continue discussion
Midterm Paper Due (NO RR due)
Presentations: _____

Week 9

10/23: Discuss *The Bluest Eye*
Read: *The Bluest Eye*
Presentations: _____

10/25: Discussion
Read: K. Pyke “What is Internalized Self-Oppression?”
Presentations: _____
RR#8 due

Week 10

10/30: Bridging the Cultures: Biracial Identities, **Intersectionality, and the New Face of America**
Read: *The Girl who Fell from the Sky*
Presentations: _____

11/01: Discussion
Read: Melissa Algranati “Being Another” (570-75); Caroline Hwang “The Good Daughter” (73-75); Joycin C. Shih “Chyna and Me” (517-23); Sandip Roy-Chowdhury “Interpreter of the Second Generation (53-56).
Presentations: _____
RR#9 due

* 11/3: last day to withdraw or apply for Credit/No Credit grading if applicable

Week 11

11/06: Discussion
Read: R. Martinez “The Crossing” (604-13)
Watch: *A Better Life*
Presentations: _____

11/08: Cont. discussion
Presentations: _____

Week 12

11/13: Consumerism and American Identity
Watch: “Coca Cola 2014 Superbowl Commercial”
Read: Richard Rodriguez “Notes from a Changing America” (165–68); “Coca Cola, Islamophobia and Consumerism”; “Are US corporations the most progressive institutions in America?”
Presentations: _____

11/15: Class and Money Matters

Watch: Robert Reich's documentary *Inequality for All*

Week 13

11/20: Poverty and the Public

Read: Annie Downey "Is there Life after Welfare?" (352–53); Bethlyn Madison Webster "Stamps" (384–85); Brenda Della Casa, "What it Feels Like to Be on Welfare" (2); Linda Tirado "This Why Poor People's Bad Decisions Make Perfect Sense" (2); Dennis Powers "I Am the New Working Poor and I'm Not Alone" (2); "A Walmart Thanksgiving"

Presentations: _____

11/22: **Thanksgiving, no class**

Week 14

11/27: What Can One Person Do?

Read: P. Gorski "Consumerism as Racial and Economic Injustice"

Presentations: _____

RR#10 due (on any text(s) from weeks 13–14)

11/29: Wrap up course/ class presentations of final project proposal

Conferences

Week 15

12/04: **Conferences. NO CLASS MEETING**

12/06: In-class peer editing. **Conferences cont.**

FINAL RESEARCH PROJECT DUE on TUESDAY 12/12.

NO LATE PAPERS CAN BE ACCEPTED