HIS 202 - AMERICAN IDENTITY AND HISTORY

Spring 2009

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Purpose: This is an introductory level, thematic, American history course the purpose of which is to explore the elusive concept of the "American character." Some of the questions we will consider are: What does it mean to be an American; how are Americans different from peoples of other countries and cultures (if, in fact, they are); if there is an American character, is it on balance a positive or a nefarious phenomenon? The problematic assumption that there is such a thing as "the" American character, as opposed to a variety of characters, is another important issue we will explore. While the course is not designed specifically as a critique of the currently popular view that the United States is, and has always been, a "multicultural" society, we will also reflect on that question as we proceed through the semester.

At the end of the term, students should have a basic familiarity with how a number of intellectuals and historical actors cast light on the question of the American character. Students should also have enhanced their critical reading and thinking skills and be able to articulate how they would go about approaching a historical question from a critical perspective.

Overview: This course is a humanities exploration offering of the core curriculum, and as such it will emphasize active learning and critical thinking. Although the course will be primarily based on discussion, from time to time the instructor will lecture to provide background information or to elaborate on an issue under consideration. To the extent that time and other contingencies permit, films may be used to supplement course material.

Because so much of the course will be based on discussion, it is imperative that students attend all classes and be consistently current with the reading. Notwithstanding the
policy that students must attend all classes, however, it is recognized that on occasion emergencies or other contingencies preclude attendance. Therefore, students will be granted two unexcused absences during the course of the semester. An unexcused absence is one for which a physician's note or a memorandum from the Dean of Students' Office is not provided. Unexcused absences in excess of two will result in a **significant reduction** in the final grade.

**Academic Activities:**

There will be frequent quizzes on the reading assignments. The two lowest quiz grades will be dropped. Three responses papers of between three and five pages will be assigned during the semester. The papers will be graded on the basis of content and the quality of writing. **Late papers will not be accepted.**

**Electronics Policy:** The use of cell phones is not permitted in class. Cell phones need to be powered off at the beginning of class. Students who are parents, however, may keep their cell phones on if they feel it is necessary, but in the “vibrate only” mode. The use of lap-top computers is not permitted in class.

**Academic Honesty:**

All students must familiarize themselves with the University’s academic honesty policy and strictly abide by it.

**Grading Criteria:**

Quizzes          45%

Papers          45% (15% each)

Participation 10%

**Required Reading:**

Andrews, William, ed. *Classic American Autobiographies*

Beers, David, *Blue Sky Dream*

Lewis, Sinclair. *Babbitt*
Morgan, Edmund S. *The Puritan Dilemma*

Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry*

Wrobel, David M. *The End of American Exceptionalism*

**Schedule:**

**January 15**

Introduction - Quotes

20 -"The Quest for the National Character, David M. Potter, 21-36
-Virginia Cyrus, *Experiencing Race, Class and Gender in the United States*, 4-6
-"Beneficiaries of Catastrophe," John M. Murrin, 3-23.
-J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, "What is an American?", 41-46.


27 -Morgan, 45-114

29 -Morgan, 115-154

**February 3**

-Morgan, 155-205
-John Winthrop, "A Modele of Christian Charity"

5 Franklin, 70-135

10 Franklin, 135-238

12 Emerson

17 De Tocqueville

19 Douglass, 229-271

24 Douglass, 271-327

26 Miscellaneous readings

**March 3**

Twain, *Old Times*, 328-412
6 Twain, Adventures, chapter I to XI
17 Twain, Adventures, XII to conclusion
19 Miscellaneous readings
24 Washington and DuBois
26 Turner
31 Wrobel, Preface-85

April
2 Wrobel, 86-121
9 Wrobel, 122-146
14 Lewis, chapters 1-12
16 Lewis, chapters, 13-20
21 Lewis, chapters 21-conclusion
23 Beers, chapters 1-4
28 Beers, chapters 5-conclusion